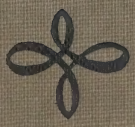

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WHEN I BECAME A MAN

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WHEN I BECAME A MAN

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

Ruth Cheyne

WHOSE INVALUABLE HELP

I HAVE ENJOYED

FOR ALMOST FIFTEEN YEARS

FOREWORD

The first part of this book deals with some of the things Christians believe, and the second part with some of the more personal implications of those beliefs. The book as a whole is addressed primarily to the person whom Dr. James B. Conant describes in his Bampton Lectures of 1952 as 'the average enlightened citizen of a modern democracy,' and who, at least in my experience, is reaching for religion.

All of the material in the book I have used in my preaching and teaching ministry in Trinity Church, Boston, and on two radio programs, the National Radio Pulpit and the Episcopal Hour. I know all too well that I myself have not yet attained that which I am trying to set before others and that my point of view will not be congenial to all sincere Christians. But for what it may be worth, to whomever it may speak, I let it go its way, with gratitude to all who have helped me begin, at least, to put away childish things, and with the prayer that we may all, in one way or another, grow up into him who is the Measure and Master of all things, Jesus Christ our Lord.

T.P.F.

Boston, Massachusetts
February 1957

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PART ONE

WHEN I BECAME A MAN

In 1900 there were 27,000 young men and women graduated from our colleges and universities. In 1950 the total was 432,000. Since then the numbers have decreased slightly, but there are still over ten times as many people being graduated now from college as there were in 1900.

These figures are evidence of the fact that we are educating more and more people all the time, that the doors of learning are being opened to a larger percentage of the people than ever before. We are thankful for this advance in education, but the rapid rate at which we are educating people creates an interesting and rather serious situation for the Christian Church, for the more a person learns about the world he lives in, the less sense he is likely to make out of the religion he was raised in.

This, of course, is not always true, but it is usually true in our day when so much has been discovered in so short a time and when our conception of the physical universe has so rapidly and radically changed that there is a great gulf fixed between the religion of our people and their

intellectual life. There is a lag, so to speak, between what people feel and think religiously and what they think and believe intellectually.

Take one specific example. The God of the Bible is a personal God; a God who speaks to persons and to whom persons speak. He is referred to always by the personal pronouns He, Him, and Thou, never by the impersonal pronoun It. The pictures of God in the Old Testament are pictures of a person; a shepherd watching over his sheep, a king ruling over his people, a judge sitting in judgment on the disobedient, the breakers of the law, a father presiding over his family.

This God made the world in six days, and he made it *as it is*. He set each order and species of life in the place especially assigned to it and there it remains, as firmly fixed as the boundaries he set for the seas. He controls the world in all its movements and activity. He is the master not only of nature, but of history as well. If a dictator falls, it is God who puts him down; if a leader rises in a crisis, it is God who raises him. If there is a hurricane, it is an act of God punishing the people, even though they know not why. If there is an epidemic, or a famine, it is a direct act of God for some specific purpose, for the God of the Bible is the God who is responsible for literally everything that happens, everything except sin. He manages the whole universe personally, from the lightning and thunder to the rise and fall of kings.

Furthermore, the God of the Bible is personally interested in everything and everybody *individually*. He knows all the stars by their names: 'he calleth them all by name and bringeth out their host by number.' He

can count the hairs of a man's head. Not a sparrow falls to the ground except he knows it, and no human being, no matter how unimportant or insignificant or obscure, ever suffers or dies except God knows it.

Most of the people who have gone to college and who have been brought up in homes where there is any religion at all, either Christian or Jewish, have been taught the religion of the Bible, and they have been brought up to believe in this sort of personal God. Then, during their college years they have been introduced to a world in which it is difficult to find such a God. The world they live in and the God they believe in simply do not go together, and the incongruity of their religion and their education is a major problem.

In the first place, they discover that the world was not made all at once by God, but that it evolved gradually, through aeons of time impossible for man to imagine, let alone calculate. Furthermore, they learn that it operates by laws, and that those laws can be known and understood at least partially, and that the better they understand them the better they can control the forces of the natural world and the happier their lives will be. They learn, for instance, that yellow fever was not an act of God sent to discipline his wayward children, but the miserable business of a particular kind of mosquito and that as soon as the mosquito was obliterated yellow fever was conquered. They learn that the Grand Canyon is not one sublime, spontaneous demonstration of the divine artistry, but a result of the slow work of erosion that has taken place through the centuries as the rivers have worn away the rocks and the ice has receded to

make the spectacle that now leaves even the unimaginative breathless.

It is as though a patchwork quilt that you supposed your grandmother had put together with her own hands turned out to have been spun through the years by invisible hands and put together by the course of events.

Students have also become acquainted with the fact that the earth is not the center of the universe, but instead is one relatively unimportant star among an incalculable number of stars. They know that from the Mt. Wilson Observatory a man can see through the telescope a hundred million stars and that they are only a fraction of the total number of stars that exist in the heavens. And they know also that it takes three years for light to travel to the earth from the nearest star.

This universe, they come to see, is a big operation, and to contemplate it fills some with awe and others with terror. As young men and women are introduced to its wonders, its mysteries, and its vastness, we are not surprised that the God of the Bible is lost in the world of the astronomers. It is too big a proposition for the God of their childhood. The personal God that they were brought up to believe in is too small for such an incomprehensibly vast universe; they cannot imagine that a God who is responsible for the stars at such great distances from the earth can also be interested in them and in what they do. Not only is the God of the Bible lost in the world of the astronomers but also they as individuals are lost in the stellar spaces of the universe.

Here he stands, our college graduate, between a reli-

gion and an education that are as far apart as the poles. What shall he do? What does he do?

In many cases, more perhaps than some of us like to think, he turns his back on his education and renounces the knowledge it has so disturbingly given him. He gives up Darwin and all he stands for in favor of Genesis.

In other cases, he rejects the religion he inherited from his family and strikes out on his own to find his way among a crowd of bewildering stars. If he reads the Bible at all, he reads it 'as literature,' and if he goes to church, he goes for the music and the architecture.

In still other cases, he tries to keep both going at the same time, never letting the religious left hand know what the educated right hand is doing. He listens piously to Genesis on Sunday and plunges enthusiastically into modern geology on Monday. His religious life rarely, if ever, meets his intellectual life. By agreement, each goes its way, as if by a legal separation.

All three of these ways of handling the situation are bad. The first is bad because man cannot turn his back on knowledge and on the truth which it ultimately reveals without sooner or later turning his back on God who is the Truth. The second is bad because man cannot live by bread alone, and if he does not cultivate the religion of the Highest, the religion of the low and mediocre will thrive like a weed in its place. And the third is bad because man is not at his best when he is divided. If his religion does not include his mind, it is a poor religion and in the long run will break down under the majestic authority of fact.

The only possible way to handle the situation is to keep religion and education as two indivisible sides of one and the same thing. As a man's knowledge of his world grows, so will his knowledge of God increase. Religion has never been static. Man began worshiping sticks and stones, but he did not continue to do so. God is continually revealing himself, and poor indeed is the man whose mind is closed to those divine disclosures, and doomed is that religion in which the truth is so fixed and final that there is no room left for fresh revelations and new insights into the nature of things.

Our immediate problem, however, is how to make sense out of Christian patterns and pictures which were originally created in the days when the universe had three stories. Must we scrap the whole thing and start fresh? I think not, and the chapters of this book will endeavor to say why not, and to suggest how the old may be made new. These chapters were originally sermons and therefore they do not approach the subject in the logical way a lecturer would approach it. They were addressed originally to people who were largely sympathetic, even though at times bewildered. They try never to underestimate or violate man's reason; they hope often to go beyond it. In some cases there are several approaches to a single subject, like variations on a main theme. But before we launch into the subject, let us go back to the great gulf that we found between the God of the Bible and the world of the astronomers.

There are two things to keep in mind, the first is that the God of the Bible is not so small as people sometimes

think. There are passages in which he seems to be a primitive god moving about the earth like the God that Adam was afraid to meet 'walking in the garden in the cool of the day.' That certainly is a small God. And there is the God who speaks personally to Samuel, Abraham, Moses, and the others, giving them specific directions as a general sends his orders to his staff. That is certainly a smaller God than some of us like to think of. But we find also in the Old Testament the God who is described as 'the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity.' There is nothing small about that! We find in the Old Testament a God before whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, 'he picketh up the isles as a very little thing.' There is nothing small about that! 'Clouds and darkness are round about him.' He is not entirely clear, not comprehensible in his entirety; he is partly hidden in mystery. He is a God who speaks to people saying, 'My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts.' Even in the early days of the Old Testament writers, while their world was a relatively small world compared to ours, their God was a great God whose spirit brooded over the waters and out of the chaos brought order in creation. There is nothing small about that!

When you read the New Testament, you find at the end of it the God who speaks in words like these, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending saith the Lord,' the comprehension of the whole of existence. And in John, who is perhaps the spirit in the New Testament most akin to us, we find phrases like these: 'God is spirit,' 'God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in

God.' There is nothing small about that; spirit, love, energies that animate and direct life on a large scale indeed!

The second thing is this. It does not always follow that the bigger a thing is the more impersonal it is. I think we are likely to assume that it does. Take, for example, the telephone system, one of the earthly mysteries that confronts us daily. If you happen to live in a small country town, you know that the telephone office is still operated by one person who is relieved perhaps at night, but not at any other time. She knows not only her business but your business, and your whereabouts, and the number that you want to call, and where you are if you are not at home when someone calls you. It is an intensely personal affair, sometimes more personal than you would like to have it. Move now to a great telephone exchange in a city; the operators have been almost eliminated; there is instead a dial system so that when you want a number you do not hear a single human voice unless the system breaks down. Normally, it is a completely impersonal system in which it seems that no personal interest is involved at all. But let me ask you this. In which case does it take more intelligence and will, purpose and skill, in the simple operation with one operator tending a few phones, or in the great complicated dial system? Is there not more intelligence, more intellectual activity, more wisdom, more planning, all the things that we associate with personality, involved in the big system than there is in the smaller system? We may be separated from it by a mechanical apparatus, but behind that network of mysterious wires are minds, brains, yes even personal inter-

est in the public and its telephone service. It is not less personal because it is big.

When Galileo first revealed his vast astronomical universe, some of his friends complained to him that he had taken away their faith in a God who cared for all his creatures. This is what Galileo said, 'The sun, with all those planets moving round it, can ripen the smallest bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else to do. Why then should I doubt His power?' Why then because the universe is big should I doubt the power of the God who can concentrate on this smallest one of his creatures and bring to fruition the seed that is latent in him? No, it does not follow that the bigger a thing is the more impersonal it is.

Let me put this finally in a picture which will reduce it to small and perhaps more manageable terms. A great many children, most children in our society, are taught when they are small that in the Christmas season Santa Claus comes from the North Pole, driven by reindeer in a sleigh full of toys, and that he visits every house and trims every tree, and leaves the presents around the tree before he departs. The child with his lively imagination and trust is perfectly prepared to accept that. He sees it: there is the tree, all lighted and trimmed, there are the presents, and Santa Claus is the perfect explanation of the facts. Then the child begins to grow and his world enlarges, and he begins to wonder and think and doubt. How can one person visit so many houses in a single night? He is fertile soil for the first older boy who comes along and tells him that there isn't any Santa Claus. If he is sensitive at all he is shocked; he has been deprived of something precious and personal, and there is a bare-

ness about his world, a glory has departed from it. 'The Christmas Spirit' does not by any means take the place of the Santa Claus to whom he could write letters, and whose reindeer he knew intimately by name.

Then there comes a time, not very long after in most cases, when the child learns that his father and mother are Santa Claus, that they along with the other fathers and mothers in the world are the personification of the Christmas Spirit, that they have bought the toys and trimmed the tree because they love him. He learned that immediately, of course, but he didn't take it in right away, not until he saw and appreciated the fact that the Christmas Spirit was incarnate in his father and mother, and that through them it could get into him. He gradually grows up into a new and larger idea of what Christmas really means.

This is the course that the child's growth has taken: he moved from a mythological man in a red suit and a white beard to an impersonal spirit, then to a personal expression of that spirit; from the mythological figure of Santa Claus to a spirit which personifies itself in his father and mother. He moved from a god too small to a spirit too vague and abstract, and then to a love that made itself real in the action of people he knew. In that movement he grew into maturity. He left some of the things behind, the shell; he kept the real thing and moved on into something better, something more appropriate to his adult life.

That is the sort of experience that most of us sooner or later have to go through. If our parents talk to us about God at all, they are likely to talk to us about him in per-

sonal terms. He is the God who is with us in the dark, the God we ask to bless our father and mother at night, the God who goes to school with us and stands by us if the other children aren't nice to us. In other words, he is the God of personal intimacy, a small, family God. And then we grow up and our world grows, and we begin to think and we begin to doubt; how can one God care about so many people at one time? We come to the conclusion that there isn't any such God. We may believe in the Life Force, or the Power that makes for Righteousness, but whatever we call it, it is too abstract and vague to make much difference one way or the other.

And then, if we are in the Christian tradition, we begin to see something else, that the God whom we were taught to believe in once upon a time personified himself in a real Person, in the acts and words and deeds of that Person. We can believe this because we know the Person. He is Jesus. We know what his Spirit is like; we can get into that Spirit and his Spirit can get into us. We can look at that Person and say, There is the God that I know; in him are gathered together all the forces that are beyond my comprehension and that only the suns and stars can tell. But here they are condensed, reduced to human terms; here they are demonstrated; here they are made concrete in actions and deeds and words that I can understand, that are relevant to my life and my world, and to this Personification of God I can be loyal for the rest of my days. I know not how God deals with the stars, but I know that in Christ God speaks to me; I know not how one God can hold so many planets in his care, but I know that in Christ God cares for me.

We go through the same process that the child goes through; we move from a mythological God with a gray beard to the God of the intellectual and abstract concept, to the God who personified himself concretely in Jesus. That is the movement that people make if they grow naturally, and that is the movement that I hope the church will encourage them to make.

Too often the church has neglected its educated people and, while Christianity is more than intelligence, Christianity without intelligence is like a body without a spine. People who are being trained in our colleges and universities must not be left with a religion that is all out of shape for their intellectual life, but must have a religion that is part and parcel of their being.

'For when I became a man, I put away childish things,' wrote Paul. He might have gone on to say, 'But I grew up into something else; I grew out of a God who was *a* person into a great God who once personalized himself in Christ Jesus; this was a religion for a man.'

The trouble with many people is that they grow up physically, and mature intellectually, but religiously they are still children, still clinging to the old red suit that Santa wore on Christmas Eve. One of the Church's greatest opportunities is to help those people become men, religiously as well as intellectually and physically.

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

We shall begin with the world we live in. It is the world of our immediate interests and activities. It revolves largely around ourselves, our families, and our jobs. It is bounded by our homes, our offices, the shopping-center, and the school. It includes the people we live with, the people we work for, and the people we play with. A large part of it is made up of the tragedies and romances that make or break our days. The extent of it depends upon the range of our interests. If we have a large number of children or are engaged in great matters of importance, our world is stretched out that much further. And the world the average man lives in, because of the telephone and airplane, is getting bigger all the time. In fact, I heard recently of a man who commuted between Rome and New York! In spite of this, the world we live in is still a relatively small world. No matter how many contacts you may have with people far and wide, your own little world, the world that revolves around you, is a small world.

But we all live in another world, the great, wide world. We live in it all the time, whether we choose to or not,

whether we think about it or not. Most of the time we don't think about it; we don't get very far away from Main Street and the store where we buy the morning paper. What I want to do now is to lead you out into that other world and, largely, for one purpose, to help you see, perhaps for the first time, how great and wide the world you live in really is.

Our first step into that world is to realize how many other people live in the same world we do. Have you ever stopped to think how many there are? In the United States there are about 160 million people. Some Americans are likely to forget that in China there are 463 million people, almost three times as many as there are in the United States, and that in India there are 357 million, over twice as many as there are in our own country. The total number of people living in the world at the present moment is estimated to be somewhere around two billion, 408 million.

And don't forget that there are no two alike. Some sit on chairs, while some prefer to sit on the floor. Some enjoy the music of the symphony orchestra, and some prefer the tuning that precedes the concert. Some eat with knives and forks, and some with chopsticks. Some make the men the head of the household to earn the living, and some give that privilege to the women. Some are up and doing by nature, and some are quiet and passive.

Nowhere is the difference more apparent than in language and religion. The people who live in the same world we do speak 2,796 different languages, and are the followers of ten great religions. There are almost half as many Moslems as Christians; almost as many Confucians

as Moslems and the same number of Hindus. Other religions, much smaller and less well known, are too numerous to count.

Just to stop and think for a moment of all those people does something to you. It makes you realize that you and your family are by no means the only pebbles on the beach, no matter where you may have been born; and, what is more important, it makes you realize that you've got to learn to live with other people. They are nearer than they once were, and you've got to learn to understand and tolerate their differences and try to see beneath the surface of their strange customs and ways. In a world like ours, with as many different kinds of people as there are people in it, we cannot be smug about our own little neighborhood, no matter how much we rightly love it. You may think that the Christian ethic of loving and understanding your neighbor is too impractical to consider seriously. When you stop to think of the number of people in the world, and how different they are, and how close they are, you begin to wonder whether any other way of behavior is practical.

And then there is another thing about the world that we do not often think of, and that is, how old it is. According to the old reckoning, which many of you were piously brought up on, the world was created in the year 4004 B.C. Bishop Ussher arrived at that date from evidence in the Old Testament stories. It is no reflection on the stories to say that the date has since been proved to be completely wrong. Modern geology has much more accurate instruments for determining the date of the earth, and according to their measurements, man has existed

for a million years; plants and animals for 800 million years. That's a long time! It gives a perspective to the present day that we cannot afford to ignore. There are some people who still cling to the old date reckoned from Genesis, but most intelligent people are glad to acknowledge the facts that have been uncovered and find the world that the geologists have revealed, with its almost unimaginable age, more wonderful, more expressive of God, than the younger world which their ancestors lived in.

The historians have something to tell us along this line, too. There have been twenty civilizations, all of which except our own have fallen. That pricks some of the bubbles of pride and self-confidence which often characterize our American life. It makes us a little less smug about our own civilization. It reminds us that there is nothing automatically permanent about it; that it will not stand of its own accord; and that, given the seeds of destruction which have brought the others to the ground, ours will topple and fall in exactly the same way.

This matter of the age of the earth, of the almost inconceivable number of years during which life has been developing toward its present state, makes us a little less impatient with the progress, or lack of progress, that we are making in our own day. God moves slowly. Man is a relative newcomer on the scene. He has improved along some lines, and don't let the pessimistic theologians tell you he hasn't. There is still room, enormous room, for more improvement, but the end is even further away than the beginning, and God is neither impatient nor in haste.

There is one other thing about the world we live in that we ought to notice, and this is the most impressive and, I suppose, the most significant thing of all. The world is very much larger than we used to think it was. Everybody likes to look at the stars, and everybody is moved by them in one way or another. Sometimes a child will ask you how many stars there are. That's quite a question! The naked eye, one astronomer tells us, can see on a clear night, if the observer is on the side of a hill or on the deck of a ship, a little over two thousand stars. With the aid of a small telescope, he can see a million stars, and if he goes to the observatory at Mt. Wilson and looks through the great telescope, he can see a hundred million stars. And then, if the child asks, 'Is that all?' the answer is 'No.' There are millions more that you cannot see. One scientist tried to give some indication of how many there were by saying that there were about as many stars as there were specks of dust in the city of London.

If the thought of those stars has not taken you out of your little world, think of the space that has been revealed by the astronomers. You know that one of the ways that men now measure distance when they get into the gigantic spaces of the outer universe is in terms of the speed of light. Light takes a little over a second to come from the moon to the earth. It takes eight minutes to come from the sun to the earth. It takes three years to come from the nearest stars. Some stars in the Milky Way are as far as a thousand light years away from the earth.

I shall not go on with any more facts and figures because I hope that you already feel reduced in size and stature. That's a healthy thing for you, once in a while. Our lives

loom so large on our horizon, and our interests and activities consume so much of our time and thought that we need occasionally to see them against the magnificent background of the stars.

William Beebe was a great friend of the late Theodore Roosevelt, and he writes this account of a visit he once paid him at Sagamore Hill: 'After an evening talk,' Mr. Beebe writes, 'perhaps about the things of knowledge or perhaps some new possibility of climbing into the minds or senses of animals, we would go out on the lawn where we took turns in an amusing little astronomical rite. We searched until we found, with or without glasses, the faint heavenly spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the great square of Pegasus, when one or the other of us would recite:

This is the Spiral Galaxy of Andromeda.
It is as large as our Milky Way.
It is one of a hundred million galaxies.
It is seven hundred and fifty light-years away.
It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.

'After an interval, Col. Roosevelt would grin at me and say, "Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed."' *

The important comment for us to add is that he could go to bed and go to sleep because, as small as the stars made him feel, he knew that his mind, the human mind, was in a sense greater than the Milky Way. He knew that

* William Beebe, *The Book of Naturalists,* Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

the mind of man that was dazzled by the distances of the Milky Way could take in and appreciate and understand, at least dimly and imperfectly, what the Milky Way was all about. In this man is akin to God.

It certainly must be apparent by now that the world we live in is far bigger than we once thought it was, and that the very fact of its appalling size leads us further and further into mystery, and when we get into the depths of mystery we are not far from God. If the chills go up and down your spine when you look up at the stars on a clear night, you are on the fringes, at least, of worship. And if you stop to think about the stars, the number of them, and the vast distances between them, how they got there and how they stay there, and why they shine at all, you are coming very close to the thoughts that lead to God.

Some of you are doubtless wondering why in the world a Christian minister, writing a book like this, should start with a chapter in which the Bible has not yet been mentioned and which sounds more like a talk in popular science than religion. I'll tell you why. I have an increasing respect for facts. They are not the end of life, by any means, but they make a good, solid place to begin. Any religion that attempts to withdraw from the verified facts of existence will in the long run fail. And especially do I feel this about the facts of the physical universe. For a great many centuries men were too busy trying to exist to attempt to understand the world they existed in. They took it largely as it seemed to be, the way a child does. But when they had time to stop and look at it, to read between the lines, as it were, they found things that they never

dreamed of before. These facts that have been discovered about the universe, and verified by competent scientists over a long period of time, tell us something not only about the world we live in, but also about the God we worship.

Here I must part company, courteously but firmly, with those who sincerely believe in the literal truth of every word in the Bible, even when it contradicts facts that have been proven about the physical universe. It goes without saying that I do not always agree with the conclusions that some people draw from the facts. But for the facts themselves I am eternally grateful. To my mind, cosmology and theology go together. To put it in plain English, what a man knows about the world he lives in is bound to affect what he thinks about God and, in turn, what he knows about God is bound to affect what he thinks about the world.

The Bible picture of the world is a very simple one. It is a three-story world: the earth is in the middle; there is an area below where people go when they die; and a great space above where God reigns, in heaven. That picture has gone, whether we like it or not, and somehow or other our religion has got to come to terms with the new picture. The God that men found in that old picture of the world has not gone, any more than your father disappeared when you discarded the picture of him taken in your childish world and replaced it by one taken in the world in which you and he both lived as adults.

Some people think that that change has already taken place in Christianity. I thought so once myself, but I

have changed my mind. There are scores of intelligent, serious-minded people who are keeping away from Christianity because they cannot fit the world of the Bible into the world that they see so clearly around them and in which, through no choice of their own, they are compelled to work out their problems and make their contributions to life. I should like to help those people if I can.

We have tried to stretch our limbs in the great, wide world that we actually live in. It is filled with power and beauty and, above all, mystery. We move in it appropriately only in humility in the face of its incomparable wonders; we deal with our fellow human beings creatively only in tolerance and understanding in view of their infinite variety; we ponder its facts reverently and seriously because of their divine derivation; we reach out for a God that we can worship, the God who alone is accountable for the inconceivable spaces in which we, infinitesimal though we be, must thoughtfully find our way from the cradle to the grave.

GOD AND THE WORLD

In the preceding chapter we thought about the world we live in, and we discovered that the more we know about it the more mysterious it becomes, and that the more we think about it the more we are likely to be asking questions like these: What's behind it all? How did it all get started in the first place? What keeps it going? What's the point of it all? Is there any rhyme or reason to it, or is it just a conglomeration of atoms and molecules thrown together, hit-or-miss? At the center of all this interstellar space, at the heart of this incomprehensible manifestation of life, is there anything that we can call God?

A child enters a big house alone. The silence of it frightens him. Is there anybody there, he wonders. That's the first thing he wants to know. We are something like that child. We stride bravely out into the spaces of this astronomical universe. The stars make us shiver with their beauty; but at the same time, we are like Pascal who said, 'The silence of those infinite spaces terrifies me.' Is there anybody there? That's our question about this vast, mysterious, star-hung universe. Is there anybody who

knows what's going on, anybody who knows me, and knows whether I sink or swim? In other words, in the midst of all those suns and stars, is there a God I can count on?

Our immediate impulse is to say, Yes, there is! We are religious by nature, you know. We may not be churchmen by nature, but we are religious by nature. There is something in us all that is aware of and reaches for that which is beyond us. All of us have, at least to some degree, what we might call second sight. We can see the wall in front of us and we can see, somehow or other, through the wall to the things beyond it. That's one of man's most notable characteristics; he can see things, and he can also see *through* things. Some can see much more clearly, of course, than others, and some have used their second sight so little that it has almost completely atrophied. But we are all, at least at the beginning, in some sense 'diviners' in that we are all aware of the divine.

It is worth remembering, this natural capacity we have for religion, especially when we get to thinking that the things of religion are entirely out of our wave length. If it is natural for us to puff ourselves up with pride, as I'm afraid it is, it is just as natural for us to bow ourselves down before something infinitely great.

Added to this natural impulse to say that there must be a God because there is something in us that gravitates toward him, is aware of him, and responds to him in much the same way that the needle of a compass responds to the magnetic pole, is the fact of our common sense. Our ordinary, everyday common sense almost demands that there be a God. When we look at a book, we immediately

assume that the book did not produce itself, but that a man wrote it, and a publisher printed it, and a store sold it. Behind the book was a man, and behind the man was an idea. The idea took shape in his mind and in the process of time became a book. We see nothing around us that explains itself. There is always something behind it. It is always the result of something else, often something greater. Why should it be otherwise with the universe itself? asks our common sense. If there is something behind a book, what about a flower, what about a star, what about a man?

So runs our common sense along the tracks that men have traveled since they first began to notice the world they live in, and to ask questions about it, and to draw conclusions. Common sense is not always a perfectly accurate guide to life. Common sense tells us that the world is flat, but we know now that it isn't. We often have to revise the conclusions of our common sense. But common sense gives us some pretty good clues to life and its meaning, and a man is wise not to throw out too hastily all the evidence of his common sense. When his common sense tells him that there must be a God, it is worth listening to and worth looking at carefully.

There is another influence that immediately begins to work within us in favor of God, and that is the influence of our training. We are the offspring of people who believed in God. Some of you as individuals may have had ancestors who were notorious atheists; I am not thinking about those inevitable exceptions. What I am saying is that the civilization that has produced us is a civilization founded upon belief in God. Not all the peo-

ple have believed in God, by any means; but the framework as well as the foundation of our particular civilization is belief and trust in the God revealed to us in the Hebrew-Christian tradition. In spite of all your private theories, over against all your peculiar inclinations, there is something in your very bloodstream which influences you in the direction of God.

What is more, the God our fathers worshiped over a period of ten thousand years or more is always recognizable wherever you meet him. It is true that men have grown in their understanding of him through the centuries, and from time to time they have emphasized first this and then that particular aspect of his being, but, by and large, his outline is about the same over an incredibly long period of time.

He is, first and foremost, the God who made the world. He is the One who conceived the idea of it in the first place, so to speak, and then had the will and the power to carry it out. He is the One from whom all else is derived. He is the creative instinct at the heart of things, turning chaos into order. He is the Designer and Planner, the Maker and Doer. The whole wide world bears the stamp of his craftsmanship and, therefore, is basically good.

He not only made the world; he manages the world. He keeps the stars in their courses and the seasons in their right place. He raises up men and puts them down. He makes the sun shine and the rain fall. He not only manages the universe, but, according to this traditional picture of God, he manages it personally and directly.

He makes the world; he manages the world; he also

manifests himself in the world. You can find traces of him wherever you go. He is outside the world, in one sense, the way an author is outside his book. But in another sense, he is very much inside the world, the way the author is in his book and manifests something of himself on every page. Strangely enough, people first found traces of God in the destructive powers of nature, in the storm and the earthquake and the volcano. Then they began to see signs of him in the quiet, still, creative forces of life, in the still small voices. And they ultimately came to recognize him in the mind and conscience of men and women. They began to think of him as the Father of all men, not only supremely powerful, but supremely good. He was the One who watched over Israel; he was the One who would preserve your going out and your coming in; he was the One who would be with you when you walked through the valley of the shadow of death; he was the One who would be your strength and hope in time of trouble.

This, roughly, is the picture of God that we all inherit, regardless of the circumstances of our birth, or the religious affiliations of our parents. It is a picture of a God powerful yet personal, awesome and yet rather intimate. It is a God in whom we can find shelter as well as judgment.

There are, then, these three strong influences working within us in favor of God. When our hearts cry out for the living God, and our souls thirst for him, there are at least these three strong affirmations of God which immediately rise up: our natural instincts and impulses, our common sense, and our inherited culture.

But we begin to wonder. Can we trust our natural impulses? We have been told somewhere, or read somewhere, that we cannot. Maybe our impulses are just hangovers from the days of the jungle when anything that we did not understand we tried to placate. And then there is another question: Can there be a God like the one our fathers worshiped in a world like ours? After all, the world they lived in was a small affair compared with ours. It was conceivable in the world as they understood it that there could be a God who not only made everything by hand, so to speak, but also managed everything personally and directly. It was even conceivable that he might know everybody by name. But in the world as we have come to understand it, is it conceivable that one manager should pull all the strings, and one mind remember all the names?

So our minds go spinning on and on until we hardly know where we are. Then to cap the climax, a bright sophomore comes home from college and says that believing in God is just like believing in Santa Claus. A child believes that Santa Claus visits every house and goes down every chimney in the whole world, and all in a single night! But once the child becomes aware of the world he lives in and what it is really like, he sees the manifest absurdity and impossibility of any such feat and he manfully gives up his belief in Santa Claus. So, says the sophomore, when the race was young it believed in a God who knew everybody by name, but now that the race has grown up and learned what the world is really like, the time has come to give up such childish notions. For

a moment, under the excitement, that seems to settle the question. There isn't anybody there! You let it rest for a while, and simmer.

Perhaps we can catch at least a glimpse of the answer from a story from real life. A child is born on a farm in the country. He is one of a large family, but his personal contacts outside the family are few. Neighbors live at some distance and the town is too far to visit except on special occasions. Life is reduced to its barest simplicities, but it is by no means shorn of its elementary joys and satisfactions. As the boy develops, he learns how to take care of animals, and how to make a garden grow. He learns what it means to put himself out for other people in the family. He sees his father and mother go it in all weathers. He becomes familiar with birth and death. He learns what it means to pull your weight and do your share. He doesn't know many people, but the ones he does know he knows by name. He knows what it means to be honest, and how to carry his burdens without complaint.

Then he goes off to the city to make his way in the world. Everything is entirely different. There are thousands of people, but hardly one calls him by name. Some of them are stranger than he thought any people ever could be. They will do almost anything to make a dollar. They don't seem to care how many people they hurt or how much damage they do. Some of them are kind and good, but they are miles apart from him. The things that interest them, he has never heard of. The things he loves, the fields and streams, the animals, the stars, they never think of. Pretty soon he says something like this to him-

self: 'The things I learned in the world I grew up in simply don't fit in this world. This is a big, impersonal world of strenuous competition and fierce rivalry; if I'm going to get anywhere in this world, I'll have to make some drastic revisions in my way of life and in my way of thinking.' And he does. He has to stretch his mind to take in a great many different kinds of people that he never had to cope with before. He has to become more tolerant and understanding of others different from himself. He increases the range of his interest to take in things like music and the theater, things which never crossed his mind before. All in all, this is an enlarging process and for a time, at least, it may seem to be changing him entirely. You would hardly recognize the country boy, so complete becomes his transformation.

But there comes a time when he suddenly realizes that, although he had a great deal to learn when he came to the city and a great many changes to make in his way of thinking about people and life, nevertheless, he brought a great deal with him, and the things he brought with him are just as valid in the complicated life of the city as they were in the simple life of his old home. The same thing that makes potatoes grow in Maine makes a tree grow in Brooklyn. The sacrifices his mother and father made when he was a child; the way his mother and father worked together in good weather and bad; the way one member of the family went out of his way to help another; the dignity of a man and the fineness of a woman — these things are valid wherever he is, in a big place or a little place. As a matter of fact, he probably had a better chance to learn them in the country where life was stripped of

some of its more distracting complications than he might have had in the city.

You undoubtedly see the meaning of the story without my saying anything about it at all. When the astronomers and the geologists lead us out into the vast world they have discovered, our first reaction is to say — What we learned from our fathers about the God of their small world will never fit in a world like this; this is too vast, too impersonal. And we will have to change some of our ways of thinking and behaving. God may not be quite so personally responsible for everything that happens as we once thought he was. He may not have quite such a ready inclination to choose certain people to be his favorites, and he may have in his care many more planets than we used to think he had. He may not be quite so much of a private God as he was once thought to be, and we may want to picture him more like the mind of a man working from within than like the manufacturer working from without.

But after we have made these enlargements, we will find that what was true about God in the small world of our fathers is true of him in any world. If there could be no creation without infinite caring in their world, the caring and the creation will go together in ours, no matter how much bigger it may be. If people were worth knowing by name then, they are worth it now. If men met a Mind at the heart of the mystery then, is there any reason to suppose they will not meet it now? If men found something that they called the love of God in their little world, is there any chance that they will not find it now when they need it even more?

God does not change, but we change. As we grow in our knowledge of the world we live in, we also grow in the knowledge of the God we worship, reaching further and further into the heart of mystery, until we are lost in wonder.

MORE ABOUT GOD

We were thinking about God in the last chapter and how our understanding of God changes and grows as our knowledge of the world increases. Now we shall approach the same subject from a slightly different angle. People who are more philosophical than religious in their way of thinking may be more at home on this path than they were on the other.

Before you go any further, try to forget yourself and put your normal occupations and cares out of your mind, even your troubles, so that you can think about God. It may not be an easy thing for you to do because you are probably not in the habit of doing it. You may not think about God any more than you think about the air you breathe or the light you walk by. You simply go on walking and breathing, not thinking much about it. That is the way it should be; most of the time, at any rate.

But there are times when you ought to think about the air and the sun, and there are times when you want to think about them, not only in reference to yourself, but also as they are in themselves. And there are times when you ought to think about God, not because you need him,

or because you are in trouble, but simply because he exists. We are assuming now that he does exist, and if he does, the fact of his existence is the supreme Fact of life.

So try to dismiss the thousand and one cares that occupy your mind at the present moment, and think about God. Perhaps I can help you by putting down very simply some of the things that Christians have thought about him through the ages; not everything they have thought and said about him, mind you. The incarnation of God in Christ, prayer, the revelation of God in the Bible, these and many other things we shall not consider now. For the moment, we shall think only about the most elemental things, and we shall think about them in terms that to the sophisticated may seem naïve. When you stop to think about God, you are almost bound to think in pictures, figures of speech, myths, simply because there are no other ways to think about the Ultimate Reality of life.

Christians share with all the religious-minded people of the world the belief that there is a spiritual force in life that is supreme and that all the rest of life is a result and manifestation of it. They cannot prove it any more than people can prove that the supreme reality of life is a materialistic force, but their experience of the world and of God leads them to believe it. They believe that the force that keeps the universe going is not a force like the force of a bulldozer, but a force more like that of a man's creative mind at work upon a problem. In other words, it is an invisible, spiritual force. It is the source of everything else we know, seen and unseen. Which comes first, the chicken or the egg, may be an embarrassing ques-

tion for the lay philosopher, but a Christian knows the answer immediately to the question, Which comes first, matter or spirit? Spirit comes first; material things like sticks and stones are the result, not the cause, of spiritual things like dreams and ideas. God is spirit, affirms the Christian; spirit comes first, always and forever. This is of the greatest importance when you stop to think about it.

Christians do not stop there; they go on to say that this spiritual force that they call God is in the universe, but not identical with it. It is something like the sun. (This is where we begin to use pictures, imperfect though they be.) The light and warmth of the sun are in the world constantly. If they were ever withdrawn, even for an instant, life on this planet would immediately cease. And yet, the sun and the earth are not the same thing, no matter how you look at them. No one could possibly say, for instance, that the earth is the body of the sun. If the earth should at any time be destroyed, the sun would go on shining as usual, but if the sun should be destroyed, everything else would disappear. Christianity says that something like that is true of the relationship between the world and God. The universe is filled with God as the earth is filled with the light of the sun, and yet God himself is not the same as the universe, is not confined within it, — if the universe should burn up, or freeze out, or in some other way come to an end, God would still exist, independent of the world he had made. God and the world are no more identical than an author and the book he writes are the same thing.

And then, Christianity goes on to say that this spiritual

force is both powerful and personal. It is akin to thunder *and* thought. Some people have worshiped gods of sheer power and seen them manifest their splendor in the fury of the storm and earthquake. Christianity goes further and says that whatever God is like — and in the end, of course, what he is really like is beyond the grasp of man's mind — he cannot be less than the best we know; he must include the qualities we find in persons — intelligence, love, purpose, and imagination — for the Maker and Source of life cannot be less than the life which is derived from him. God is personal as well as powerful, and can, therefore, be approached as one person approaches another.

Finally, Christianity says that the primary personal characteristics of this spiritual force which is in the universe and yet not identical with it are purpose and goodness. Just as a man who amounts to anything at all has a purpose not only for his day but also for his life, so the Supreme Reality of life has a purpose which he is working out. That purpose is not always apparent to those of us who are sometimes caught in the web of its incomplete performance, but Christians believe that, in spite of this inadequate perspective, there is a purpose which from time to time becomes unmistakably clear and that the spiritual Force which drives the universe is not only purposeful but good. This is the point at which Christians launch out into the deep. To say that there is a Supreme Power behind all things is one thing, but to say that that Power is like the father of a family who cares for each and every individual in that family is quite another thing. Yet this is what

Christians say, and what they mean when they say, 'God is love.'

Let us rehearse briefly now what we have said about God so that you can keep it in your mind — and remember, this is not what I personally say but what Christians through the ages have discovered to be true.

God is that spiritual force in life which is supreme, from which all the rest of life, including yours, is derived, which is in the universe and yet not identical with it, both powerful and personal, whose personal characteristics are, first and foremost, purpose and goodness.

Now you may say, especially if you are inclined to ask questions about things like this, How do Christians know that there is such a God? Or, you might ask me personally, How do you know that there is a God as you have described him?, and What possible grounds can you give us for believing in such a God? You admit you would like to believe in him, for it would solve many of the riddles which are now unanswerable, but you want to know how you can in the face of the facts of life?

In the first place, it looks as though there might be such a God. In our ordinary, everyday experience, there is always something beyond, or sometimes behind, the immediate object of our attention. If we pick up a book we know that there is an author behind it without whom the book would never have come into existence. If we cross a bridge, we know that there is an engineer without whose engineering genius the bridge would never have been flung from one bank to the other. If we go into a home we know that there is a mother and father whose love for each other and for their children

has brought that home into existence. So, it is perfectly natural to say to ourselves that there must be something beyond the world we live in. The world doesn't explain itself, and what lies beyond it we call God.

And then, also in our ordinary experience, order normally points to mind. If we find a pack of cards in which every card is arranged in sequence according to suit, we normally assume that somebody has been working on the pack. Cards do not fall into order by themselves, not as a rule at least. So when we look at our universe and see the order that customarily prevails, we assume that a mind has been at work upon it. The seasons don't happen to fall into place, and the stars in their courses don't just happen to keep to those courses without the intervention of something like mind.

Another reason why Christians believe that such a God exists is that in their experience of life in general, meaning usually implies a thinker. If anyone gets a cablegram in code, he assumes that behind the cablegram and the code there is a message to be decoded, and behind the message is a man with a mind. To most people, life means something. It may mean more at some times than at others, but there are very few people to whom life is completely meaningless, and once you come to the point where you say that life has meaning for you, you are at the point of assuming that meaning implies a thinker.

And also, there are times in your own life when it seems as though there must be a God like the God of our Christian belief. We come to a point where we begin to detect a design for our lives. It appears that we are

made for a specific purpose and to perform a definite function. Perhaps our life was spared at a time when it looked to everyone as though it would be lost, and the only reason for it that makes any sense at all is that it was spared for a specific purpose. If you can look back on your life and see how events have converged to bring it to the place where you now are, you will not find it difficult to believe that that converging power is none other than the God of the universe.

Most of us, at least at times, feel a power not ourselves. We know what E. A. Robinson meant when he wrote, 'I don't say what God is but it is a name that somehow answers us when we are driven to feel and think how little we have to do with what we are.' We are born, we live, we die. Our birth is not a matter of our own choosing; the date of our death is outside the range of our knowledge, and our life is a series of events which for the most part are unpredictable and inexplicable. We rest, as it were, in the cradle of a Power far greater than any earthly power we know. There are times when we feel that Power as a Presence.

I remember how one time when I was quite young I walked out to Stonehenge early one morning. There stood the great stones which centuries ago were arranged there by the Druids or their predecessors, set up as altars to unknown gods. There they were in the early morning sunlight, and I the only human being present. The centuries in between seemed to condense and disappear. As the sun rose higher and higher over that primitive altar, I felt that I stood in the presence

of the Sun of righteousness who rose with healing in his wings.

It is in experiences like that that we become most sure of the reality of God. What happens is that our emotions, which lie deep in us, confirm the thoughts which have been going through our minds, and together they make one affirmation — that God is and that if he is, then life for us becomes not only possible but good.

GOD IN CHRIST

We begin this chapter with the observation that abstract things tend to become concrete, general things tend to become specific. We see it happening all the time. Beauty in general takes the shape and color of a specific rose. An idea, racing around invisibly through a man's brain, suddenly takes the shape of a book that can be picked up and read. Goodness in the abstract becomes concrete in a good deed. Truth in general is constantly pressing to be expressed in a specific truth, like the truth that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The invisible is continually searching for a visible expression. Things, so to speak, are always coming to a head, that is, coming to the point, where they can be seen and grasped by human beings.

It is not at all inconceivable, therefore, that on a much grander scale the invisible God of our Fathers might also become visible, that Deity in general might take specific shape and form. Far from being inconceivable, it seems to me altogether likely that he might.

In a universe where the intangible realities of the spirit are constantly pressing themselves into visible shapes and forms, it would seem strange if the greatest of all those invisible realities remained aloof from the world of material manifestations.

As a matter of fact, Christians believe that God did not remain apart from his world; that the invisible God took the form and shape of a visible man; that he became specific; that he came to a specific point, so to speak, in Jesus of Nazareth. This is the heart of the Christian religion. This is the drawing power of it. It puts before men and women the mysterious God of the planets who in the fullness of time became the incomparable Carpenter of Nazareth. A mystery? Yes, but scarcely less mysterious is the fact that the invisible and intangible, everywhere we meet them, have an almost irresistible urge to become visible, touchable, specific.

Let us look at this man in whom Christians believe that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt visibly, and let us try to look at him as though we were seeing him for the first time. That will be almost impossible for some of you because you have become so familiar with Jesus, know him so well, that you might pass him by if you met him on the street, the way you hardly notice the color of the houses that you pass day after day. You need to see him freshly. And those of you who have hardly seen him at all need to see him for the first time.

To begin with, he lived almost two thousand years ago and that separates him from us by a good many things beside time. He lived in a very different world from ours, different in its way of living and thinking, and we have

to be careful not to make him into the successful, modern American.

Beside that, he was a Jew. People with anti-Semitic axes to grind have tried to prove from time to time that he was not a Jew, but as far as I know all their attempts have been discredited. To be sure, he was a Galilean and not a Judean, but for our purposes that is hardly more than a technicality. And, granted such a thing as this was to take place, who among the people of the ancient world were better prepared than the Jews to provide the vehicle? They had a long acquaintance with God, and their spiritual leaders one by one had led them into a deeper and more profound understanding of God. Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, paved the way for Jesus.

He was born into an artisan's family, although the rumor very quickly spread that there was royal blood in his veins, that the family was a branch of David's royal line. He was in all probability trained to be a carpenter, but when he was about thirty he left home and started out on an itinerant ministry. He went from village to village telling people that the Kingdom of God was about to come and that they should get ready for it. He told them what it was like, so that they would know how to get ready for it. He had an extraordinary power to make sick people well, all kinds of sick people, the physically disabled as well as the mentally unstrung. This he did over and over again, but he insisted that the healing of the sick was simply one of the signs of the nearness of the Kingdom.

He took from his early Jewish training words and phrases that had made a lasting impression upon him

and used them to carry more meaning than they had ever had before. He taught the people, for instance, to think of God as their Father, just as the Jews at their best had always thought of him. But by 'father' he meant all the deepest implications of that word. If God is your father, then he is your neighbor's father also. If God is your father, then you must trust him the way a child trusts his father. If God is your father, he will never let you go, no matter what you do; he will look for you until he finds you, the way a shepherd looks for his sheep that is lost; he will understand you even when he disciplines you; he will forgive you even though what you have done breaks his heart.

Religion to Jesus was something so real and so natural that it could never be entirely a matter of rules and regulations, or of ceremonial practices and performances. He saw people all around him, highly respectable people, going through all the motions of religion and yet never letting the disturbing motions of religion go through them. He watched people keeping meticulously the letter of the law and at the same time breaking the spirit of which the law was supposed to be the agent. He went to the synagogue regularly, and the first place that he went to when he entered Jerusalem was the Temple. He knew that in some sense religion had to be organized, but he also knew that when the organization became an end in itself instead of the means to an end, it needed to be cleaned out from top to bottom, and he proceeded to do it.

He had a large popular following from the beginning, and it is not hard to see why. The people loved him be-

cause he loved them. He treated them as though they mattered and as though their lives really counted. They didn't always understand him, and they weren't prepared to pay the price involved, but the deeps in their own unfulfilled lives answered to the deeps in him, and they followed him in droves wherever he went.

It was quite a different story with the leaders. They were against him from the beginning. They weren't secure enough in their own position to tolerate anyone so completely secure that he was afraid of nothing. They could see clearly that if he survived, they would not. Their privileges as custodians of the traditional religious system would be swept right out from under them if the people really returned to the religion of the spirit. Either he would go or they would go. It did not take them long to decide which it would be. He must go. And he did go, on a Friday that will never be forgotten as long as the human race endures.

They killed him on a cross, according to the Roman custom. His popular following, as you might expect, did not stick it out to the end, and even his closest associates and friends were noticeable by their absence. Yet there were a few who stayed to see him die. What they saw they never forgot, and they told their children and their children's children. The gist of it was that he died just the way he had lived, trusting God, thinking of other people before himself, not complaining about his fate but asking God to forgive the people who were putting him to death because they did not really know what they were doing.

When his body was taken down from the cross, it was put in a rich man's tomb, but Jesus himself did not re-

main there. It was hardly three days after his death when his closest friends saw him and talked with him. They knew that he was alive and that death had no power over him. He had gone through it, the way we will all have to go through it, and had come out on the other side of it alive. He would be with them until the end of time. In him the love of God had come so near them that they could feel it as never before.

This, so briefly and inadequately sketched, is the story of the man whom Christians believe to be God incarnate. They believe that in him the invisible God became for a moment visible, very much as a man declares and reveals his whole self in one brief, strategic act. In Jesus something was revealed and released. Something of the very nature of God hitherto unknown was revealed, and something of the power of God's love hitherto unavailable was released, we might almost say, let loose in the world!

Right at this point one or two warnings are in order. And the first is, beware of those who think that this tremendous fact of God in Christ can be completely put into words or into a single theological formula. People who have any great experience are bound to express it in words, but the words only approximate the experience itself, and different people might very likely use different words to express the same experience. It is interesting to notice that no two New Testament writers use exactly the same words to describe what happened in Christ. Some call him the 'Son of God' and some the 'Son of man.' John calls him the 'Word of God.' Sometimes they think of him as the Messiah, sometimes as the great High Priest. Paul thinks of him not as the pre-existent Son of

God, but rather as the one who became the Son of God, and none of them thinks of him in exactly the same terms as the fourth-century creeds use to describe him.

Yet, in spite of these differences in terminology, they are all absolutely agreed that in Jesus God was winning the world back to himself, and that in Jesus the love of God became an explicit reality, nearer, more real than hands and feet.

Unfortunately, Christians today are often more interested in the way a man expresses his faith in Christ than they are in the faith itself. Words are important, make no mistake about that, and they cannot be used loosely or carelessly in religion any more than they can in science. But what lies under the words is more important than the words themselves. I have known some people who were willing to make no profession of faith in the doctrine of the Incarnation who were nevertheless completely under the spell and influence of Jesus, and who acted toward him as they would toward God. And I have known people on the other hand who made all sorts of elaborate confessions of faith in Jesus as the Son of God, yet who showed not the slightest sign of treating Jesus as the central factor in their lives.

The other warning is really a reminder. Remember that Jesus was a real man. Granted that he was an extraordinary man, that he had unusual powers, and that he cannot be compared with any of his comrades, nevertheless, he was a real man. When he wanted to reach a destination he had to travel to get there. When he wanted to reach a conclusion he had to think things through. When he had problems he had to think them out; and when he

had temptations he had to fight them out. He was not omniscient; he had a mind limited as every human mind is limited, even the very greatest. He rose above the current of his time, to be sure, but his feet were firmly fixed in that current.

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that people have most often doubted the Divinity of Christ. They have not. What they have most often doubted is his humanity. They have adored him so greatly that they have been tempted to lift him completely out of the context of ordinary human life. They have tried to enshrine him in the heavens when what God was trying to do all the time was to come down out of the heavens into the ways of the world. No one will make this mistake if he keeps close to the New Testament, for the men who wrote it had not the slightest doubt that Jesus was a real man. That was the point of the whole thing; that God took upon himself human life, as it really is, to lift that life up to be what it may become. They never said that Jesus was God in disguise; they said that Jesus was God in man.

Some of you may not have thought about these things for a long time, and some perhaps never. You may now be thinking to yourself, How in the world do they know that Jesus is God incarnate? What evidence can they possibly produce to prove it? None. Things like this cannot be proven. They can be confirmed in experience and there is ample evidence for that. Some people find the evidence they are looking for in the miracles Jesus performed; some in the claims that he made about himself; some in the particular way he was born. All of these considera-

tions point to the fact in question, yet to my mind none of them will mean much to a person who has not grasped the meaning of Christ to begin with.

When you tell someone that the windows of Chartres Cathedral are the most beautiful windows in the world, and he asks, How do you know? What can you answer? You can tell him what the experts think; you can show him by comparison all the other windows in the world; you can analyze the glass and the story that the glass tells, but if he doesn't see it for himself, nothing you can say or do will prove it.

The best we can do to help people see this cardinal truth of Christianity is to help them see Christ. There he is! Simple, yet profound; gentle, yet strong; Jewish, yet universal; young, yet eternal; man, yet God! Look at him. Live with him. Let your mind dwell upon him, and your heart be open to him. Get into his spirit, and let his spirit get into you. See then if more and more you do not find in him the power and the love of God brought incredibly near to you without in any way reducing their strength or detracting from their grandeur. See if you do not find by looking through the small end of the telescope the vast mysteries and wonders of God brought ever so much closer to you.

THE EVIL IN THE WORLD

Going back now to the world we live in, we notice that in spite of the fact that the world is wide and wonderful and filled with beauty, it is also filled with evil. If you have any doubt about the existence of the evil, all you have to do is to look at the morning paper. You are likely to find items such as these: a man swindles the government out of four million dollars; a twenty-four year old mother kills her three children, believing that God told her to do it; an army cargo plane falls and kills fifteen young men; and a United States senator 'blasts his critics in both parties' and the poisoned fumes of ambition and deception and moral confusion are breathed by the whole nation.

Different people explain evil in different ways; they have different conceptions of its origin and nature; but when it comes to the plain fact of evil it is hard to see how there can be any difference of opinion. There are some religions that say that evil is not real, but they can hardly say that it is not a fact. Not only do planes crash with their precious cargo of young lives, but also human beings crash, morally and physically, and those who do

not crash are often crushed by what seem to be great steamrollers of disease and destiny.

We can't go very far in any religion until we come to some terms with this fact of the evil in the world. We may not like to think about it, but until we do think about it we are not prepared to meet life and to meet it well.

For the purposes of analysis, we can start out by saying that the evil we find in the world is of two kinds, natural and moral. When a hurricane rips the houses of a town right off their foundations, or when an epidemic of polio paralyzes hundreds of young people almost overnight, or when a fire or flood destroys a whole town in a single day, we call it a natural evil, in the sense that human beings are not responsible for it. Natural evils like these remain ultimately mysterious. God obviously allows them; whether or not he deliberately intends them, we have no way of knowing.

It is perfectly possible that destructive events like these may bring about in the long run something good which we are not able to imagine at the time. For instance, the great fire of London in 1666 destroyed 13,200 houses, as well as St. Paul's Cathedral. It must have seemed like an unmitigated disaster. Now, when we see the magnificent building that Sir Christopher Wren was inspired to put in the place of the old one, the picture is not quite so dark. Things that parents make their children do, and which seem to the children at the time unadulterated nonsense and evil, are later discovered by the children to have been for their own good.

A Christian has no cut and dried answer about natural

evils like these. He has something much more subtle and much more useful, an attitude toward those evils which helps him to meet them and withstand them. While he does not presume to understand either their origin or their purpose, he is confident that God keeps the reins of the universe in his own hands; and even though, for reasons which he does not understand, God allows things which he may not intend, things like hurricanes and plagues, and though at the time they seem to be pure and unmixed evil, yet he is sure that in the long run even these dark things can be woven into the total pattern of life in such a way as to enhance it. And the Christian has also a sturdy attitude about meeting this kind of evil when it hits him. He does not complain about it, or get bitter because of it. He sets himself to handling it as well as he can; doesn't ask too many questions at the moment; and does what he can to help the people who have been hit the hardest; and if he himself is the one who was hit, he takes it quietly with the assurance that something can be made out of it.

Jesus himself made no attempt to explain evil. He refused to accept the orthodox explanation of his day that it was always a punishment for sin, but he offered no dogmatic alternative. Rather he spent his energy dealing with evil and, where he could, defeating it.

Let's leave the natural evil in the world and turn to the moral evil. That comes much closer home for the simple reason that it originates in people like you and me. Let's put it very simply first. We have the fantastic ability to make wings and fly like birds through the air. We have also the fatal disposition to use those wings to

wipe out a whole city in a single night. We have the almost god-like energy to break loose from familiar surroundings and start life in a strange land in order to worship God as we wish. We have also the almost demonic tendency to indulge in our own religious persecution within a generation of the break, and the colony which was founded on the principle of religious freedom almost flounders on the practice of religious persecution.

Without wishing to exaggerate facts, can't we say that human beings have a tendency to spoil every single thing they touch? Love is the most wonderful thing that we know anything about in the world, and in a sense the love of parents for their child is the purest form of love, the most unselfish love we know. And yet, even that love, so potentially good, can be, and often is, so completely spoiled by the parent who tries to possess his child, keep him when he should let him go, protect him when he should let him take his chances with the rest, and make it easy for him when he should make it hard, that it is no longer good but evil.

The family is in a sense the best thing we have in life and it can produce the finest fruit of which the human race is capable. And yet, the family at this very moment, in this very country, is the source of more unhappiness and frustration than we like to think. The number of families that don't get on with each other has never been calculated, and I for one hope it never will be for the shock of it would be more than most of us could stand.

The church, you might think, would escape this infiltration of moral evil. Not at all! The original followers of Jesus were looking for real religion and they found it

in him. In less than two centuries the very church which grew out of those original followers was superstitious, formal, and worldly. The church is no more immune to this tendency in human beings to let the worst get the better of them than any other group or organization.

So we come to the solemn fact that every good thing we know can be spoiled by people like us. Think of the coat of many colors that Jacob made for Joseph. It was a coat of great beauty, elaborately embroidered in Oriental elegance. It was given by the father to his son as an expression of his love, the best that we know in life. What could be more thoroughly good than this? And yet, in the very act of giving it to Joseph, it became the coat of Jacob's favoritism for this one boy over and above his brethren, an indication of how the affection of a parent for a child can be perverted, can be spoiled, so that it is no longer a good thing as it originally was. Then, as the young Joseph wore it, flaunted it, flashed it before his less-gifted brothers, it became the sign of his pride and vanity, and, as the brothers looked at it, it became the coat of their envy. Finally, in an attempt to deceive their father, after they thought they had killed their brother, they dipped it in a goat's blood, and drenched it with the blood of deception. When they took it home and showed it to their old father, and he saw it through the tears of his grief, it was a garment soaked in the sorrow and tragedy of human life.

Something good had gone terribly wrong, and that coat has been handed down, so to speak, from generation to generation, given, worn, envied, first by one and then another, and the wrong has been passed on from person

to person, inherited by each of the younger generations in its turn.

We have come now to the point where it is almost impossible to deny that there is in each of us what we might call a 'crooked streak.' I do not mean to imply that we are all 'crooks'; that is obviously not true. What I do mean to imply is that we all have a strong predisposition to have our own way, regardless of the consequences, in spite of what it does to other people. Or, to put it in another way, we are all incurably selfish. We have fine moments when we rise to great heights of unselfish action, but then invariably we return to the old levels where we begin once more to stand up for number one.

It is exactly this which is the primary cause of the moral evil in the world. It is this which makes war and allows poverty. It is this which upsets families, ruins churches, and ultimately brings governments to their downfall. One of the things that I would like you to do today is to admit, perhaps for the first time, that there is this sort of crooked streak in you. You can't do anything about it until you admit that it is there, and it is a continual surprise to me how many people, otherwise intelligent, are blissfully unaware of this downward tendency in themselves.

Christianity has several things to say that will help you deal with the crooked streak in you when you once face it. For one thing, it says that the crooked streak is not congenital. That makes all the difference in the world. If you are born with a fatal flaw or weakness, there is not much you can do about it. If it is, on the other hand, something which you have acquired, there is a good

chance that you can do something about it. This tendency to selfishness, according to Christianity, is not something that the race was born with; it is something it acquired. *You* may be born with it as part of your human inheritance, but the race was not. God did not put it in the original 'mix' of human nature. Some people think he did, even some Christians. They think that God condemned man from the beginning and then, to show his graciousness, saved a few later on. I speak for those who separate themselves from any such conception of God.

If God didn't put it there, how did it get there? It got there largely because of our freedom. We have, as a matter of fact, a wide range of freedom within the fixed limits of our existence. We have the capacity to become godlike; but we have also the freedom not to. We have the capacity to love the way God loves; but we have the freedom not to. We have the capacity to imagine things that do not yet exist and to bring them into being; but we have also the freedom not to. We are constantly tempted to use our freedom not to, and we habitually do. We are free to make an automobile; we are free to use it for the good and pleasure of mankind; but we are also free not to use it for good, and to drive it so fast and so recklessly that we kill an innocent pedestrian. That is the crux of our problem.

The moral evil in the world, according to Christianity, arises largely out of the fact that men can be great and often choose not to be. There are others who think that it arises out of the fact that men are devilish by nature, and there is something to be said for that. Right now, the

way men and women are behaving, the exponents of that theory have a substantial amount of evidence on their side. But I still stand where thousands of Christians have stood for centuries, on the side of man, created good by God, with infinite possibilities, with the freedom to misuse them if he wishes, and with a strong inclination so to do.

Christianity has another insight into this whole question of moral evil. It is almost impossible to put it into words that will be acceptable to all. Indeed, it must now be apparent to all, that matters as delicate as these are not easily caught in nets of words, and the wise man will not be too quick to condemn what his neighbors say about things like these for the simple reason that words are altogether inadequate to describe facts of human experience which are so deep and so vast.

This is the Christian insight, that there is a Devil somewhere in the picture. He is often called Satan. It doesn't really make very much difference what you call him, or how you picture him, with or without horns, hoofs, and fork. The point is that there seems to be in the world an evil streak that is over and above anything that man is responsible for. There seem to be powers of evil that get men in their grip and will not let them go. Jesus talked and acted as though he believed this. He spent a large part of his short ministry fighting the demons which he believed possessed people and distorted their whole life, physically and spiritually. He himself wrestled with Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, and he spoke about the kingdom over which Satan ruled.

During the last war when we saw evil on a scale vaster

than we in our pitiful ignorance had ever conceived possible, some of us were driven in desperation to this ancient Christian insight. Unless there were powers of evil greater than any human beings could account for, we could not see how the atrocities that actually took place could even have been dreamed. We remembered, almost with relief, how Christianity has said from the beginning that not only man fell, but that one of the chief angels fell. He too rebelled, and used his freedom to go his own way, so that the crooked streak we found in man runs in some strange way all through the universe.

This may seem to some of you a dreary point of view to express at a time when the world is already dreary enough, and yet I think that more and more of you are realizing that we shall never get anywhere by blinding ourselves to the facts of existence, and especially to the unpleasant ones. For a long time, around the turn of the century, we tried to make ourselves think that all was right with ourselves and the world. We know now that it isn't, and that we are not in a position to do anything about it until we admit it.

Christianity is essentially an optimistic religion, but it is pessimistic to this extent; it sees that men can be devils if they choose to be. Unless you see that, you will not see, because you will not need, the tremendous release that Christianity can give you from just this devilish tendency. You do not want to be morbidly obsessed with it; neither do you want to be foolishly ignorant of it.

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

From one point of view, there was nothing particularly unusual about the death of Jesus. It was premature; he was young, too young to die, scarcely more than thirty. But so was Mozart, thirty-five; and John Keats, twenty-six; and so were most of the 389, 769 American youths who were killed in World War II. There is nothing particularly unusual about the prematurity of it. Also it was cruel; he was crucified. But John the Baptist was beheaded, Jeanne d'Arc was burned at the stake, Savonarola was hung, Edith Cavell was shot, Socrates was poisoned, and thousands upon thousands of Jews were killed in the gas chambers of the German prison camps. So there was nothing unusual about its cruelty. It was undeserved; he had done nothing wrong, at least as he is judged by the ages; he had spent his whole life doing good. But neither had Socrates done anything wrong; he was one of the great benefactors of the human race. Neither had Abraham Lincoln, neither had Gandhi, neither had hundreds and thousands of other people whose lives have been snatched away from them in one way or an-

other, innocent victims of a world that tramples down the lives of the good.

Moreover, the death of Jesus attracted almost no attention at the time. He was too little known; he had spent most of his life in a tiny province in a part of the world which was then used more or less as a thoroughfare between two great empires, the centers of civilization. And this event, while it took place in one of the great cities of the world, was more or less off the beaten track of the world's affairs and, when it happened on that Friday, there was no great wave of grief that swept the country, as we remember so well when Gandhi died, and Franklin Roosevelt; there was no shock that shook the foundations of the society men lived in. People hardly knew that anything had happened at all.

And yet, when his friends went out into the lands round about to talk about him, to spread the news of him to other people, one of the first things they talked about was his death. 'We preach Christ crucified,' they said, and while the Jews were not responsive to what they said because to them the death of Jesus was a stumbling block, and the cultivated Greeks were not always attentive because they thought it was philosophical foolishness, the rank and file of the people in the world listened to them and were all ears to hear what they had to say about this death. Paul, of course, was the most eloquent; it is with his words that we are most familiar. I am not going to recount them now; you can open the New Testament to almost any page and find some reference to them.

It is interesting to us just in passing to notice that in

the early days the disciples did not go very much into the details of the drama; there is no indication that they told very often the whole story of the trial and finally the crucifixion itself, and what Jesus said on the cross. That came later, thank heaven, and we are grateful to those who wrote the story down in the second and third generations so that we now have the story which the first friends and followers knew because they were a part of it. Nor did they mourn over the death of Jesus when they talked about it. Did you ever think of that? The things that they said about the death of Jesus were not in any way like the things that Shelley said when he talked about the death of his friend Keats. They were not weeping for Adonais who was dead, the way Shelley wept. Rather, when they talked about the death of Jesus what they had to say had an air of triumph about it. You remember how Paul said, 'God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ.' It was more like the waving of banners than the shedding of tears. And if you came to this without any preconception or without any preparation, you would wonder a little how it could be so. How could they speak of a deed so cruel with such an air of triumph and rejoicing?

The answer is along these lines. The cross had done something to them that went right down to the roots of their being, and when they talked about the death of Jesus, they were not talking about a death notice that could be put in a paper, they were talking about something that had given them new life. They could talk about it in the most victorious and triumphant terms because they felt in themselves and in the people to

whom they talked a new life already beginning to spring up as a result of what had happened.

What was it about the death of Jesus that made it possible for them to talk like that? What was there about that death that has made so many people remember it for so many years?

1. *It was an unnatural death.* It was not time for Jesus to die; he was too young, barely thirty. He didn't die in the natural course of events; he was killed. The reasons for it are all tangled up the way the motives and reasons for most events are likely to be tangled, and they are hard to straighten out. But some of them are easily distinguishable. For one thing, Pilate did not want to get caught out on a political limb. It was essential to his career that he stay in favor with 'the administration' and to do that it was sometimes necessary to cut a few moral corners. And then another reason was that the Pharisees from whom you could expect the strongest religious leadership were frozen in a legalistic pattern, and Jesus had completely alienated them by his attack upon their outward observances, which were like shells from which the life and spirit had long since departed. The Sadducees, who were the well-to-do administrators of the Temple, were safe in the *status quo* and were not prepared to tolerate anyone who might upset it. They were the declared enemies of Jesus from the beginning. And then the people, who were attracted to Jesus in great numbers, were either too ignorant or too indifferent to support him when the crisis came. And so through the courts of justice Jesus was rushed, and through the city gates, to a hill where criminals were crucified.

In that single criminal act the elemental weaknesses of humanity are laid bare. Pilate is not the only one who has played for political favor; the Pharisees are not alone in their pious practices which completely smother the life of the spirit; the Sadducees are neither the first nor the last who have fought for the *status quo* because upon that side their bread was buttered; and the people, whose stupidity was exceeded only by their indifference, are by no means unique.

When we look at the death of Jesus it is like looking in a mirror. We see ourselves, and our own sins! We see the crimes and follies of our own day. And that is one of the reasons why people keep looking at the cross. They want to know about themselves; they want to know where their weakness lies; they want to see themselves as others see them. It is not easy to do that. Our minds can cleverly conceal us from ourselves and make us think we are far better than we really are. We turn to the cross of Christ to see what we are really like, even though the spectacle may make us cringe.

2. *It was an undeserved death.* Jesus was not a traitor, though some of his enemies tried to make out that he was. He was not a criminal in any sense of the word, and no one was foolish enough to attempt to prove that he was. He was not a crank, or a disturber of the peace, except perhaps during the last week of his life when he stirred things up in the Temple by clearing out the markets. He was a man who went about doing good, and doing it in very specific ways, making sick people well, giving people who had missed the bus a new lease on life, teaching the people what life was all about. To be

sure, he was by no means mild, and if the people had followed out the implications of what he said and did, it would have meant some radical changes for all of them, especially for those in high places. But as we look back at him, the things that Jesus stood for were for the ultimate good of mankind. The least you can say of him is that he was mankind's greatest Lover.

And that is why his death does something to us that nothing else does. When the guilty suffer, we take it as a matter of course. We perhaps delight secretly in the justice of it. But when the innocent suffer, that is another matter, and that does something to us. It isn't easy to say exactly what it is, and perhaps it is better not to try. You know what it is. You remember how you were shocked when you heard that Gandhi had been killed. Whether you agreed with him politically or not is beside the point. You recognized the fact that he was a good man, good in the sense in which only a few men are good; that he rose far above the confusion and bitterness of our time. Of all men he deserved least to be killed. If it had been you yourself, there might have been some reason for it, or anyone else you could think of. But not him! His death, because it was so undeserved, in some strange way shamed you out of your own impurities.

If you felt that way about the death of Gandhi, is it any wonder that people have felt that way, only infinitely more so, about the death of Jesus? Jesus the immaculate one, the one least of all who should suffer, the one member of the human race who most deserves to be honored, he it is who is humiliated! That does something to you. It cleanses you from your sins. Don't try to explain it;

you probably can't. Neither can you get away from the fact that the death of this perfectly good man somehow makes up for the blunders of the rest of the family. One supremely good deed, somehow, takes the curse off the household. One perfect act, in some way, makes up for all the imperfections of humanity. When you take it in, you feel as if you had been washed. You don't feel at all as though you had been let off from your responsibility. You feel more as though you had been prepared to take it on.

3. *It was a voluntary death.* Jesus did not have to die; he chose to die. There is no possible way to penetrate the mind of Jesus so as to say with certainty what his intentions were at any particular time, and those who presume to do so are treading on dangerous ground. The Gospels help us a little, but they are more helpful in their description of what actually happened than they are in their attempts to describe the intentions in the mind of Jesus. It seems plain that in the beginning he did not intend to die, and when people threatened to kill him, he very quickly got out of their way. Then his mind seemed to change. The opposition more and more showed itself to be insuperable. If he wanted to bring people back into the family of God, there seemed to be only one way to do it, and that was to suffer and die.

There are times, even in our limited human experience, when there seems to be no way to reach people except by suffering. A minister can talk to people from now until doomsday; he can work himself to the bone trying to help them; and yet, one single experience in which the people see him suffer voluntarily and without bitter-

ness will do more to crack the hard shells of their indifference than all the rest put together.

Again, is it any wonder that the death of Jesus has broken the hearts of men and women for centuries? The very fact that he did not have to do it, that he could have withdrawn to the quiet country life of Galilee and lived out his days in peace; that he did it, so to speak, for me and mine, this fact in itself is enough to draw people to Calvary. That is what Paul could never get over. 'He gave himself for me,' he kept saying. The fact that Paul knew he did not deserve any such generosity made the act of Jesus all the more compelling. It brought the best out of him, as it invariably does when people take it in. If you were drowning in the Atlantic and somebody who was actually a much better and more valuable person than you risked his life to save you, it would do something to you. It would bring out your best, and that is exactly what the death of Jesus has done for millions of men and women.

4. *It was the fulfillment of a lifetime.* Sometimes death as it comes in the natural course of events seems to be almost a denial of a life. It disintegrates a person, and we can watch a person who has been considerate and kind all his life become difficult and sometimes even mean as death draws near. We can see the physical powers deteriorate, and as they do the character begins to change for the worse. It was not so with Jesus. Jesus was magnified in death. He died at the height of his powers, and death far from diminishing his personality vastly extended it. He had talked about forgiveness all his life and had practiced it, but it was another thing to

practice it on the cross, and to forgive the people who in their ignorance were putting him to death. He had always been interested in the people who had lost their way; that interest was magnified on the cross when he spoke to the penitent thief and promised him his company in heaven. He had always been thoughtful of other people; that thoughtfulness was magnified on the cross, when in spite of his own suffering, he took time to think about his mother's future. He had always trusted God the way a child trusts his father, but that trust was infinitely magnified on the cross when he committed himself into his Father's hands. Indeed, death in the case of Jesus was one supreme dramatic fulfillment of a life. It brought the whole life into sharp focus.

This is another one of the reasons why his death has been dwelt upon for so long by so many people. It traces in the most vivid line the traits of the perfect character. The qualities that we admire in him as he went about Galilee positively stagger us when we see them standing up under the torture of the cross. We know so well our own temptation to fall down, or to let down in time of stress. We do pretty well when everything is going well, but when the crisis comes, when we have to make a quick judgment, when we have to stand up under opposition and adversity, then we don't always do so well. We crumple under the strain more than once.

With Jesus it was not so. Death drew out his very best and set it up against the sky where none could fail to see it.

5. *God was in Jesus drawing the world to himself.* You can look at Jesus from two sides. From one side you see

a human life, unfolding as all human lives unfold, growing, developing, moving out from the family into larger circles of responsibility, and finally dying. That is the human side of Jesus. When you look at him from the other side, you see something quite different; you see God coming into human life, revealing himself in terms of human existence, manifesting his glory in the beauty of a human face, and, above all, showing his love by doing something that unmistakably expressed it. That is the divine side of Jesus. The two sides are no more separated than the two sides of a penny, but it is almost impossible for us to see both sides at the same time. The best we can do is to look first at one side and then, holding that in our memory, look at the other.

It is when we look at Jesus from that other, far side that the cross begins to exert its unique power. It is then that we see the death of Jesus not merely as the culmination, the heroic climax, of a perfect life, but also as an event in which God is trying to tell us how much he loves us, that he understands us, that he does not hold our past against us, that he wants us not simply to obey him the way a sergeant obeys a general, but to love him the way a child loves his father, and to trust him the way a child trusts his father. The only way he could expect us to love him and to feel at home with him was to make himself lovable, and this he did in Jesus, and more especially in the death of Jesus.

To be sure, you get hints and intimations of God's love in other ways and in other places. You can believe that God loves you even if you have never heard of Jesus, but some of us would find it difficult. We are a part of the

more than two billion people alive at the present time; we live on a tiny planet that is almost lost among millions of brighter stars; we live a life that falls far short of the best we know; we are told about a God that we can neither see nor hear. We know that he has a will of his own because we run into it once in a while, but how can we know that he loves us unless he does something within the area of our human experience that will show us that he does? The answer is, he has.

These are five of the reasons why the first Christians talked so much about the death of Jesus and why people still think about it, and why the death of Jesus, more than any other single event in the history of mankind, has arrested our predisposition to selfishness. I have not attempted to state any formal doctrine about the death of Jesus for two reasons. First, because the church in the mainstream of its teaching has never attempted to set forth any particular doctrine of the Atonement, and second, because when people have attempted to do it, their efforts have never been completely successful and sometimes have been seriously misleading.

I have heard versions of the Atonement which suggest to the innocent listener that by his death Christ assumed all the responsibility for our mistakes, paid the penalty for them, and that we go scot free. Others make God out to be an angry God who had to be placated by the death of his innocent Son before he would consider forgiving the rest of the human family, and still other versions imply that the devil had to be bought off before he would leave us alone and let us go. All these attempts to explain what the death of Christ does undoubtedly have elements

of the truth in them. My own inclination is not to try to explain a mystery like this. We know that the death of Jesus reaches down into the very heart of our life, that it touches the sorest spots of our life, and that its touch is a healing touch. We know that it somehow or other lifts the burden of excessive guilt; we know that it helps us to control that pernicious tendency of ours to have our own way; we know that it draws us into the very heart of the reality of God as nothing else does; we know that year after year, when Good Friday comes around, we stop to think about the death of Jesus because in some strange way it saves us from our sins, not from the consequences of them, but from the tyranny of them.

Personally, I would rather not try to explain it. I am content to say of it what E. A. Robinson said of his play *Van Zorn:* 'It is supposed to open, or partly open, all sorts of trap-doors and windows that will give people glimpses into their own cellars and door-yards, and incidentally a fairly good view of the sun, moon and stars.'

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The first thing that the followers of Jesus told people about him was not where or when he was born, or what he said and did, or when and how he died. What they told first about him was that after he had been crucified, was dead and buried, he rose from the dead, was seen by many of his friends, and was alive at that very moment.

Why do you suppose they began at that point? Why did they not start with the Lord's Prayer, or the Beatitudes, or the story of the Prodigal Son? Why did they start at the end, so to speak, with the story of the resurrection?

We can only guess what the reason was, for they seldom took time to explain their actions, and almost never stopped to examine their own minds. But the reason becomes obvious to us when we stop to think what we would do if we were given the choice of having a record of everything someone we loved had said and done, or having the person himself. Given a choice like that, surely we would say, Keep the record and give me the person. It is the

person that makes the difference, and his presence is worth all the things he ever said or did put together.

It was Jesus himself that made the difference to his friends. Not that they did not appreciate what he said, or marvel at the things he did, but it was his own presence among them that transformed them and lifted them up to new levels of life. When he came into a room, everything in the room was changed. When he walked through the outer courts of the Temple, the sacred place was purged of everything that was impure.

And it was Jesus himself who appeared to them a few days after his death. Some of them saw him. Peter and James and John, for example. On one occasion a group of the Apostles meeting together saw him. Some saw him in the garden, some by the side of the lake; others in the upper room, or on the way to a little village outside Jerusalem. Later, Paul saw him in the sky, like a blinding sun.

Others, who did not see him the way these people did, nevertheless felt his presence in the group. When they broke bread together in the meal that was so peculiarly associated with him, they knew that he was in the room with them. When they prayed together, they felt the power of his spirit enabling them to do the impossible. Even though they might not see him in the same way they had seen him before, they could no more doubt his presence than they could doubt the heat of the sun.

And some of them felt that he was alive in them. A person can mean so much to another person that one can virtually take possession of the other, leaving him completely free to be himself, yet empowering him to rise

above himself. So Paul felt that Christ was alive in him, strengthening him, enabling him to do all things. Others felt the same thing, in varying degrees. The spirit of Christ was alive in them, and they were made alive in him.

This is what they wanted to tell the world about. Their Lord and Master was not dead, but alive. His life was not over and done with as they had for a few days inevitably supposed it to be. His words were not the remembered words of a dead person, but the words of a living spirit. His deeds were not relics to be stored in the archives of history; they were the actions of a living Person. The presence that once stirred them out of death into life had itself become alive.

Fortunately, they never tried to describe what the Presence was like in too great detail, nor did they ever presume to explain it. The brief references they make to it show clearly that it manifests itself differently to different people. To some it was a Presence as real and material as flesh and blood, and breakfast by the lakeside, while to others it was a more spiritual thing that could come and go through closed doors, and be in Jerusalem and Galilee at the same time.

But to all it was a Presence. And this was the point. This was what they could not wait to tell people, and this was what people wanted to hear. It is perfectly easy to see why. What is it that you really need when you are up against things, or when things are up against you? You need a person, not a principle. You need love, not a law. And you need that love expressed in some tangible, communicable way. If your spiritual and moral blood

count is low, what you want is not a lecture on ethics, but an introduction to a person who can enrich by contact and transfusion your debilitated bloodstream.

That is why the people all over the Mediterranean basin listened so intently to the preaching of the first Christians. If they had begun with the Sermon on the Mount, the people would have turned away edified, but in despair. One more unattainable ideal with which to thrash the languid and haunt the conscientious. But when they began with the news of a Person who once spoke the words of the Sermon on the Mount and told the story of the wayward son, and who was now alive, present in their midst, powerful to help them, is it any wonder that the people hung on their words? And when they entered the life of the group, they found the Presence themselves.

At this point there is doubtless a question beginning to take shape in your mind. It did in mine as I thought of these things. Why don't we begin with the resurrection when we think and speak about Jesus? We do, theoretically, in our creeds; and we profess, at least by implication, our belief in the resurrection every time we celebrate Sunday and keep it holy. We make a great day of Easter, and we say that we believe that on the third day Jesus rose from the dead.

But if you ask ten people what it is about Jesus that means most to them, nine out of the ten in many a Christian congregation will begin with the Lord's Prayer, the parables, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Christmas story. And if the truth were known, they would be embarrassed if the subject of the resurrection ever came up.

This is the last thing, not the first, that they would bring up of their own accord. Why is this? Why is it that we who are the same sort of human creatures as the people of the Mediterranean world, needing the same kind of thing, and who, if we had the choice between the record of what a friend said and the friend himself, would take the friend every time, why do we begin at the other end with the historical records, rather than with the resurrection experience of a living spirit that can be known and felt here and now?

One of the reasons may be that we are afraid of the empty tomb. It brings up all sorts of questions that we would not like to have to answer, and it is difficult at best for our twentieth-century mind (which is no better than any other mind, but different) to take in the fact that the physical body of Jesus was at a certain point resuscitated and then gathered itself together and walked out of the tomb in which it had been so lovingly laid. It is almost impossible for us to take that in seriously, since it corresponds with nothing else in our experience, and we are congenitally suspicious of things of which we have had no previous experience. We do not say, the way some have, that the story is not true; we simply say that it is beyond us, that it conveys nothing real to us. And the tragic result is that we shy away from the whole resurrection experience because of this story that we cannot quite handle with the contemporary instruments of thought.

Far be it from me to say that the story is not true. I am content with a statement of infinitely smaller dimensions. And that is, that even though the story of the empty

tomb is repeated in various forms in all four of the Gospels, thus showing that it was a part of the tradition of the earliest Christian community, nevertheless, it is significant that the sermons and letters of the early Christian disciples as they are recorded in the New Testament, from the Acts of the Apostles through the Epistles to the Revelation of St. John the Divine, never mention or refer to the empty tomb. Perhaps they take it for granted, and assume that everyone knows it; or perhaps they are not familiar with the story. Whatever the reason is, they never talk about a tomb being empty; they always talk about a Man being alive.

Different people will draw different conclusions from this observation of fact. My conclusion is this: the Resurrection of Christ does not depend upon the story of the empty tomb, and we would do well to follow the example of the first Christians and begin where they began, with the fact of the Presence, alive and among us now. Some of us have seen him — some, in vivid and dramatic form. Others have seen him with the eyes of their understanding. We have seen suddenly, as we 'see' a truth, that Christ is alive, real and strong, and terribly present. Our friends may tell us that this is the work of our imagination, and our response may be the response of Joan in Shaw's play about her: when her inquisitors said that the voices she claimed came from God came from her imagination, Joan answered, 'That's how the messages of God come to us.'

Some of our Christian brethren will insist that this is not an objective experience, that it all takes place within the four walls of our wishful minds. I wonder what they would say about Isaiah's experience in the Temple when

he saw the Lord 'high and lifted up.' Was that purely a subjective experience, and if so, do subjective experiences normally come to pass with nothing from without to incite them? At any rate, to us it is real and we do well when we stand by it, regardless of what more literal-minded men may say by way of criticism.

Others who have not seen him in any sense like this have felt his presence in the church. They may feel it as they come and kneel at his altar rail, not merely as they look back over two thousand years to a supper that once took place in an upper room, but now, as they kneel, confessing at the same time their emptiness and their eagerness to receive and enjoy the new Life which comes to them in bread and wine, hidden from any who have not the eyes to see, but to them plain and clear and real.

Or, they may sense the Presence as they watch the rehabilitation of human lives that come to the Christian fellowship for help. They see people who have left their future behind them take a new lease on life; they see people as hard as nails, softened by the love of Christ; they see people with apparently no conscience and no sense of responsibility suddenly change their ways and grow up; and they see people whose life is all but lost in a mist of insignificance, gradually begin to open like a flower.

Now, this may be the work of some dead, lifeless force, but it is harder for me to believe that than it is for me to believe that Christ rose from the dead. And when, in spite of my inadequacies and failures, I know that my own life has been picked up and used by the Christ Spirit, used for purposes beyond anything I ever dreamed of and with

an effectiveness far beyond any poor achievement of mine, then I know that Christ is alive.

How it came about I do not know. Personally, it is hard for me to picture it in physical terms. But as far as that is concerned, it is hard for me to picture it in any terms. I keep an open mind about the story of the empty tomb. It has spoken to generations of honest Christian men and women, and the chances are that it will speak to countless others yet to come. But the resurrection story that speaks most powerfully to me is the story that tells how two dejected friends of Jesus were walking toward Emmaus, and how Jesus himself 'drew near and went with them.' I have never seen the empty tomb, but I have walked the way of discouragement and disappointment, and felt Jesus himself draw near.

THE LIFE WE LIVE IN CHRIST

When we thought about the death of Christ we did not attempt to define any particular doctrine about it. What I did try to do was to draw a picture of that death, from various angles and points of view, in the hope that seeing it, it might do for you what it has done for so many others, namely, that it might lift the burden of frustration and guilt which now lies heavily upon you. For it is a fact that the death of Jesus, more than anything else we know, has given people a new start in life, has changed them from fearful, ineffective human beings to confident and creative ones. In other, more familiar words, the death of Christ has the power to save people.

Now we move on to the question, once we are saved, once we get a new start in life, a new slant on things, and a new approach to the reality of God, what then? Are we left to carry on by ourselves and get along as well as we can, or is there a way that we walk in, a person that we follow? You know the answer to those questions already. We are not left to our own devices; there is a way; and above all, there is a Person to follow. And you know who

that Person is. If a doctor saves your life, you become one of his most enthusiastic followers. In exactly the same way, if Christ gives you the key to life, opens the closed doors for you, and saves you from a life that is wasted and warped, you become one of his followers.

One of the things that it means to follow Christ is to try to do what he does. When I was a child, one of the games we often played was called Follow the Leader. One person was chosen as the leader and all the rest of us lined up behind him. He then proceeded to lead us in a succession of absurd and fantastic performances, and the game was to do whatever he did. If he jumped over a fence, we had to jump over it. If he waded through a pool of water, we had to wade through it, and if he went on all fours through the street, we had to do the same thing. That is what it means to follow the leader, to do what he does, no matter how difficult it may appear to be.

When you become a follower of Jesus, you start out to do what he did as nearly as you can. For instance, Jesus didn't put much stock in money or the things that money can buy. In fact, he made it quite plain that those things, if not kept in their proper place, can be more of a hindrance than a help to people. He traveled light, so to speak, with almost no luggage, whereas we are inclined to travel with twenty trunks and fifteen pieces of hand luggage. But when we become followers of Jesus, we deliberately try to be mastered less and less by these material things, to keep them in their place, and to put our primary emphasis on the things that last, things like the clarity of our human relationships, the understand-

ing we have of God, and the wonder of his presence in the world.

Another thing about this particular Leader is that he cared about the people that nobody else cared about, the people who were beyond the pale, the people who live on the other side of the tracks, the people whom the respectable church people would not go near. He cared about the people who had had a rough time in life, either because of their own foolishness or because of circumstances that were too much for them. We, on the other hand, are naturally inclined to pass by those people. They might get us in trouble, and they certainly wouldn't give us any pleasure, so we let them quietly pass. That is, until we become a follower of Jesus. He stopped to talk to the beggar, so we stop; he touched the loathsome sores of a leper, so we do the same; he sat down to eat with people whose reputations might be questioned by a Senate investigating committee, so we venture to do the same. Sometimes we get left behind, further behind than we like to admit, but we get up again and make a new start.

Then again, Jesus trusted God the way a child trusts his father. He put his whole trust in God and then went about his way to do his will without any fussing or anxiety whatever. Our inclination, of course, is to trust God up to a point and then rely on our own precautions. We are a little like the man who went out to sail in his friend's boat. He trusted his friend and the boat, up to a point, but he took his water wings with him. We trust God when we begin to do something we know we ought to do, but then we get fidgety about it and begin to won-

der whether it will come out all right unless we take a few measures of precaution on our own. This is one of the points at which the following of Jesus becomes most difficult for a modern American. He is brought up from the very beginning to rely upon himself, and it's terribly difficult for him to learn to rely on God. I would go almost so far as to say that it is much more difficult for an American to trust God than it is to love his neighbor, and when he sees his Leader make that superlative leap from the things of earth to the things of heaven, from confidence in human resources to faith in divine energies, that is when he is most likely to fall down.

Jesus was in constant contact with God. You have the feeling as you read the Gospels that the two, that is, the Divine Reality and the Created Son, were in uninterrupted communication, that they were perfectly united in will and spirit. On our part, we think of God only occasionally and sometimes not then. We give him an hour on Sundays, sometimes begrudgingly, watching the clock, and a few minutes perhaps every day if we can spare them. One of the things that it means to follow Jesus is to think of God more often. I shall have more to say about prayer, but now I say only that to follow Jesus is to pray more often.

One of the things that Jesus did that most often stumps his followers was to forgive his enemies. He had a great many and he was outspoken in his opposition to them, but he never held a grudge against them, and when he died he prayed for their forgiveness. Most of us don't have many personal enemies, when we get right down to it, but it's difficult for us to forgive the ones we do

have, especially if they have done something that has seriously damaged us. It's not easy for a woman to forgive her husband when he deserts her, or for a man to forgive a more wealthy competitor who deliberately uses his advantage to cut the ground right out from under him. Nor is it easy for a mother to forgive a country whose armies have killed her son. This whole business takes us right into the nerve center of life. This is no matter of mere intellectual consideration; it involves the emotions and the deepest loyalties of a man or woman, and we must not lightly pass over the fact that a follower of Jesus is required to take into the circle of his understanding and care even his enemies, the people who have struck below the belt. If a person has no intention even to try to do that, he cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus.

Jesus never used force, unless you wish to describe his action in the Temple the day after Palm Sunday in terms of force. Personally, I should not so describe it. But even if you do, his life as a whole is a life with no armor whatsoever except the armor of his undaunted spirit. He did not hit back when men hit him. He knew that you can never get back at anyone; you can only get back to him, get down to his level. Most of his followers, in this country at any rate, make no attempt whatever to follow him at this point. They believe that if you don't stand up for yourself, no one will stand up for you, and they interpret this to mean that you give back as good as you get. That's what they teach their children, and in general, that is what they practice in everyday life, regardless of what they say they believe on Sunday. This is one of the

places where we need to stop and think. The way of Jesus is a higher way, more costly, to be sure, but a way that looks not backward to the jungle but forward to the manifestation of the Sons of God.

And so it goes. Jesus humbled himself and we try to be more humble. Jesus never wavered in opposition. We try to face it the way he did. Jesus took up his cross, and we try to take up ours. May we not make this statement by way of generalization? A large measure of the best that men have done for twenty centuries can be traced to the fact that they were trying to follow Jesus, their Leader. Not everyone would agree with this, but I make the statement without any apology that the greatest single moral incentive ever known in human history is the desire to do the things that Jesus did.

And yet, after you have said all that, there is something frustrating about trying to follow Jesus. Going back to the childhood game that I mentioned earlier, I well remember what happened when a strong, husky, and daring boy was chosen as the leader. I simply could not do the things he did and I was left behind. I couldn't get over the fences he could jump; I couldn't run as fast as he could, and, for me at any rate, the game ended in despair. There are many people that have the same sort of experience when they try to follow Jesus. They just cannot keep up with him. They cannot treat their enemies the way he treated his, no matter how hard they try. They cannot keep lustful thoughts out of their minds, no matter how sincerely they try. They know they ought to stop worrying, but they cannot. They know they ought to think about God more often than

they do, but they don't. They try to follow him and do the things he did, but they follow so far behind that they begin to lose sight of him altogether. If this is all there is to the life in Christ, then many of us are lost right now in the depths of failure and disappointment.

But I am glad to say that there is another sense in which we talk about following a person, and I don't think we often think of it. Occasionally, you find an old man who is particularly attractive to children and is especially fond of them. When he says that one of them follows him every step he takes, what does he mean? Does he mean that the boy is following him in order to do everything he does? Not at all. He means that the boy is following him because he wants to be with him! The boy loves to watch him work; takes in everything the old man does; absorbs his spirit, so to speak.

When men dropped everything to follow Jesus, I am sure that they did it for two reasons. The second reason is that they wanted to do what he did and be like him, but the first, I am almost sure, was that they wanted to be with him. They wanted to be where he was, watch what he did, listen to what he said, breathe the same air he breathed, live in the climate of his presence. And I am also almost sure that when Jesus said to people, 'Follow me,' he had something like that in mind. He wanted them to be with him, to stay around him, to watch him. And that is what made all the difference in their lives. They were close enough to him for a long enough time for what you might call a transfusion of life to take place. Something of his spirit got into them. They were never exactly like him; they never perfectly matched his per-

formance; no human being could. But they were with him so constantly that people began to identify them by that simple fact, that 'they had been with Jesus.' They caught something of his Spirit and often did things that were amazingly reminiscent of him, and when Stephen died people remembered immediately how his Master died.

That, I think, at least suggests the answer to our problem. The answer will not be the same for everybody, but I would put it in terms something like these. You will never be able to do exactly what Jesus did, and the harder you try the further you are likely to be from succeeding. That does not mean that you will not go on following Jesus in the sense in which we first talked about it. You will go on deliberately trying to live your life more nearly as he lived his life, but there will always come the time when you will say to yourself, I just can't do it. But the life of Jesus can be in you the way the spirit of a school gets inside a boy, that is, if you get close enough to that life. His spirit can get inside you and animate you so that you will find that without any apparent effort you are doing things that you never dreamed you could do, and that every once in a while you are reminding people of Jesus.

I hope that puts a slightly different accent on the whole matter of following Jesus. I hope it takes some of the strain out of it. I certainly would not want to take any of the moral responsibility out of it; please understand that. But I would like to take some of the frustration and tightness out of it. I hope that it may open up a whole new world to you, namely, the possibility of be-

ing in such close association with Jesus, the living Christ, that his spirit will get into you and you will get into his spirit.

You know how it works in everyday life. A young man who has aspirations to be an artist chooses a master he wishes to follow. He tries to be like him in every detail; he copies him. That is a natural way to begin. But he comes to the point where he realizes that he cannot really copy him; he copies only his mannerisms. He must be himself, and paint his own way and not his master's. He continues to live with the master, to immerse himself in his spirit, to let the master's life and spirit get into him, and the influence of the master dominates his life. But he goes about his way painting his own pictures, in his own style, in which, mysteriously enough, spectators immediately discover the influence of the master. That is something like what Christians mean by life in Christ.

There is a wonderful line in Mark's Gospel that will bring this chapter to a close. It begins the account of Jesus' taking his friends to go up to Jerusalem for the last time. The atmosphere is charged with the impending danger. 'They were on their way going to Jerusalem,' writes Mark, 'and Jesus walked on ahead. They were puzzled and bewildered but they kept on following him.' Three cheers for those bewildered men! They kept on following him even though he was far ahead of them. He will always be miles ahead, so far ahead that sometimes he seems small, but the Christian who has been saved by him and restored to his dignity by the love of God that was in him on the cross, will keep on following him, just to be near him.

LIFE IN THE CHURCH

The preceding chapter may have left you with a question in your mind. We were thinking about what it meant to follow Jesus and we decided that it meant not only trying to do what Jesus did, but also being with him, keeping close to him, so that there may be a gradual and silent infiltration of your life by his spirit, much the same way as a plant that is kept in the sun is invigorated by the life of that heavenly body. Now the question is, How in the world can we keep close to someone who lived two thousand years ago? It is not only the length of time that separates him from us; it is also the difference between his world and ours. Once in a while we get a glimpse of him even in our own industrial age, but how can we get near enough to him for his spirit to have any effect whatsoever on ours? That is a real question and deserves serious consideration.

We can start out by saying right at the beginning that no two people will answer it in the same way, for people find various ways of keeping close to Christ. For a great many it will be a sacramental way. Jesus apparently anticipated the very question we are asking, and the night

before he was crucified he met with his closest friends and participated in a ceremonial meal that they had shared over and over again. This time he identified the broken bread with his own broken body, and the wine with his own blood about to be poured out upon Calvary, and implied, at least, that as the bread and wine fed their physical bodies, so his life poured out in death would continue to feed their inner life. And it turned out exactly as he had anticipated. They found that he was closer to them in that meal than at perhaps any other time, and therefore, when they met together to remember him and to unite in his spirit, they repeated the meal and felt his presence incredibly real and close.

That was the beginning of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or the Holy Communion, or the Mass, or whatever you call it. It all springs from the fact that physical things often contain and convey spiritual realities. Bread and wine, set apart in the proper way and under suitable circumstances and surroundings, contain and convey to thousands of people the life and spirit of Jesus the way nothing else does. There, behind the veil of physical things, is hidden the real presence of Jesus, and to those who have the eyes to see, he reveals himself in the breaking of bread.

Other people are more likely to find the real presence of Jesus in the Gospels. They know that he is not dead, and that he is by no means shut up in a documental tomb. But they also know that on the pages of those brief tracts we call the Gospels they can trace his living image. When they read his words, they can almost hear his voice, and the more familiar they become with the record and the

picture that the record draws, the more real the living spirit of Jesus becomes to them. In their worship the reading of the New Testament and the interpretation of it is likely to assume a larger place than the sacramental observance of the Last Supper.

There is no reason to think, however, that these two ways should be in opposition to each other, or set over against each other as they often are by the zealous proponents of one or the other. The mature Christian needs both ways. He needs the immediacy of the sacramental way. He is a physical creature himself, and he needs the things he can touch and see to lead him to the things he cannot see. But he needs also to keep this sacramental presence continually informed by the figure that once lived in Galilee and that he now finds on the pages of the New Testament. Sacramental religion entirely cut loose from its historical moorings is like a man who worships the spirit of ancient Greece but has completely forgotten what the ancient Greeks were like! It is one thing to find the presence of Jesus in the sacrament, no one dare minimize that; but it is another thing to be sure that the presence you find is the presence of the Jesus who preached the Sermon on the Mount and not the imaginary Jesus of a mythological system. It is worth remembering that some devout Christians have not found Christ in the sacramental life, while others have. That fact may temper our judgment of other people.

But there is still another answer to the question, How can I keep close to someone who lived two thousand years ago? The answer is that he is living now and you will find him in the fellowship of those who follow him. It looks

as though that is where Paul found him first, in the group of people who were so completely devoted to him that they were almost miraculously drawn together by him. In the life of that group Paul found the spirit of the risen Christ. He watched that spirit take young men like Stephen and mold them into martyrs. He saw something happening in the lives of people; people were being set free who had been slaves all their lives to some habit of thought or behavior; people whose faces had been sad and dreary were lighted from within by a light that is not on land or sea. It was this risen Christ who finally struck Paul down on the road to Damascus.

We are talking, you see, almost without realizing it, about the church, and we are saying that if you want to come into close contact with Jesus today, you can do that in the church. I know what some of you will be saying to yourselves; you will be saying that you lost Christ in the church, that you tried your best to make a go of the church and you found so much bickering, so many factions and feuds, such second-rate leadership, that in order to keep any Christian disposition whatever, you left it. I am willing to grant all that you say about the failure of the church, and about the failure of churchmen to manifest the spirit of Christ to the world. But I still cannot get away from the fact that when you get a group of people together who are sincerely trying to live their lives in the spirit of Christ, something happens that happens nowhere else. People are virtually raised from the dead when they are drawn into that invigorating fellowship. It isn't that each individual in the fellowship is a perfect Christian; it would be silly to make any such claim as

that. All we are saying is that as the members of a team are drawn together and inhabited, so to speak, by the spirit of the school for which they are playing, so the individual members of the Christian fellowship are drawn together and enlarged by the spirit of Christ.

When you find a man who really wants to meet the spirit of Christ, make sure that he realizes that that spirit is something alive, not dead. Tell him to read the Gospels, and be sure to take him to church, but not merely as a matter of formal Sunday morning worship. Initiate him into the group in which the spirit of Christ is constantly renewing the lives of men. If your church is not the kind of church in which he can see and find that spirit, then there is something radically wrong with it. Perhaps it is putting too much of its emphasis on the side lines of Christianity, spending too much of its energy on church suppers and too little on feeding the inner lives of its members. Perhaps it is exhausting its energies on civic causes and other highly worthwhile activites and saving nothing for its primary function of bringing people into the presence of God. Or perhaps the people are so narrow-minded, so sure of their own way, that there is no room left for the spirit of Christ. Whatever it may be, find it out, and help the minister to root it out, for if it comes to the point where people cannot find Christ in the Christian community, the chances are that they won't find him at all.

Some of you may be resisting the church because you feel that you cannot honestly accept what the church believes. We all take our hats off to honest men and women of that kind, but we also have some questions in our

minds. We wonder whether or not they really know what the church believes. In my own experience, I am constantly meeting people who say they cannot accept the Apostles' Creed and after a few simple questions, I find that they have almost no idea at all what the church really means by the Creed. They think, for instance, that if they say that they believe in 'the resurrection of the body,' they are professing to believe that on some day in the future all the bodies of those who have died through the centuries will be reassembled. Heaven forbid! Some people in the church may have believed that, and some still do, but certainly the great majority of Christians have not believed that. Find out what the phrase 'the resurrection of the body' means before you say that it keeps you out of the church.

The same sort of situation arises in connection with other phrases in the creed, and with other doctrines. Some intelligent people, for example, are scared to death of the doctrine of original sin. When they find out what it really means, they accept it gladly as the most obvious and also the most optimistic explanation of the fact of evil in human nature. I am not implying, of course, that everyone, once he knows what the teaching is, will believe and accept it. There will be many who cannot honestly do that, and let no follower of Christ dishonor them for their religious honesty. All I am saying is, if you are staying out of the Christian community because you think you can't accept its teaching, be sure you know what the teaching is.

Another thing about the church that disturbs a great many serious-minded people is the fact that it is divided

into more than two hundred independent churches. How do you expect us, they say, to find Christ in a church that is broken into so many fragments and disagrees on so many things? I, for one, have great sympathy with their question and I am interested in every move that will reunite the church. On the other hand, I see that the matter isn't as simple as the layman is likely to think it is. Some churches are divided at the present time by issues that no longer exist, and an outsider has every reason to feel that they are kept apart largely by the small-mindedness of their constituents who are so in the habit of looking at things from their own private point of view that they can no longer see things in a larger context.

But there are other divisions which are the result of two important facts: (1) that no two people are made exactly alike and (2) that the Christian Gospel is too great to be completely and entirely grasped by any one man or any one church. The first fact is obvious. No two people think alike, and no two people approach God in exactly the same way. Some can approach him directly without any material aids at all, and others cannot. Some find him by way of their minds; they think their way to God. Others feel their way to him; their emotions are more sensitive and active than their minds. So long as there are these basic differences in people, it does not seem to me likely that any one church can satisfactorily minister to the whole of Christendom, and that there will inevitably be churches as far apart as the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand and the Society of Friends on the other.

The other fact is perhaps not quite so obvious. The

greatness of the Gospel makes it almost impossible for any one mind or any one group of people to grasp it in its completeness. The greater a person is the more people will vary in their opinion of him, and the chances are good that no one opinion will take in the whole personality of the man. It was that way about Jesus from the very beginning. More than once in his Gospel, John writes that the people 'were in two minds about him.' And these were not always contrary opinions; they were often supplementary opinions. One person saw one side of him, and another person saw a different side. Occasionally, they caught in a flash the Person as a whole. I doubt very much if Peter and Paul would have gotten very far in a doctrinal discussion about Jesus. They were very different in temperament, and their experience of Jesus was completely different. But they both adored the same person, and they both tried as hard as they could to follow him.

This fact of division runs all through the New Testament. People who came into Christianity by way of Judaism with its strong emphasis on the pattern of the Law naturally approached the whole thing quite differently from those who came into it by way of the more cosmopolitan world of Greek culture. The important point to grasp is that while they were very likely to be divided by doctrine, they were united by their devotion to their Lord and Master.

It does not seem likely to me that Christians will ever be able to make a completely united approach to Christ, and I am not sure that it would be good if they could. The greatness of the Christ calls for more than one ap-

proach; no single accent or emphasis, whether Protestant or Catholic, can possibly do justice to the vastness of the subject. The higher and more majestic the mountain, the more avenues there are from which men may approach it.

What I hope and pray for is that the churches will learn to appreciate their own deficiencies and their need for each other. There are signs, I am glad to say, that we are moving in the direction of greater understanding and appreciation of each other, but every once in a while there is a serious setback. This ought not to surprise us in as much as this particular problem is not basically a religious one; it is rooted in the fact that human beings have a natural tendency to think that their way is not only the best way but the only way. It doesn't take very much experience in life to see how silly that is, but it is taking Christians more time to see it than you might reasonably expect.

In the last analysis Christians today will be united in the same way they were in New Testament times, not by doctrine, but by devotion. The devotion comes first, and out of it grows the doctrine. Both are important, but the greater of the two is devotion. When one man who is completely devoted to Christ meets another man who is also completely devoted to him, he is drawn to him like a piece of steel to a magnet. They don't sit down to discuss their different doctrinal points of view; they kneel down to offer their Lord and Master all that they are or ever hope to be.

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

There are two kinds of religion, those with hope and those without it. It may surprise you, if you haven't thought much about it, that most of the great religions of the world are religions without hope. They train their people to achieve tranquillity by renouncing hope. After all, if you can bring yourself to the point where you never look forward to anything better in life, you will not be upset and disappointed if you do not get it. But there are a few religions, at least two that I know of, that hold on to hope even though they have to renounce tranquillity to do it. Christianity and Judaism are these two great religions of hope. According to the teachings of both religions, life is not like a music box in which the music goes round and round and comes out nowhere — and, incidentally, plays the same tune over and over again. Life is more like a march that has a starting point and a goal toward which it is moving.

You may be wondering what bearing all this can possibly have on anything that concerns you at the moment. I'll tell you. If you have a son between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, he is likely to be drafted at any moment,

if he has not been called already. He may be trained to fly jet planes, or he may be taught how to make hydrogen bombs. He may be just one of the ground crew. That doesn't matter. What does matter is whether or not he will eventually be killed in another world war. Is he going to be plowed under to feed the lust and stupidity of a generation of men and women who have failed to work out their basic problems? This question, you see, leads into a much bigger question: Is there any hope for the world? Is there any possibility that the world will improve as it grows older, or will it just keep on going from bad to worse until it finally collapses? You don't even have to have a son in the service to feel the force of those questions. If you yourself have had a rough time of it; if you have been caught in the wheels of the world's competitive machinery; if you have been swept up into the basket of anonymous shavings from the floor of the world's workshop — then these questions are bound to rumble around in your mind.

Christianity has a bold, affirmative answer to them. Yes, there is hope for the world, and that hope is in Christ. You would not expect all Christians to agree in their interpretation of this hope, and you are exactly right. They don't.

Some of them believe that the hope of the world is *another* world which Christ will bring when he comes for the second time. Speaking for myself, and I think for a great many other Christians, that interpretation of the Christian hope does not satisfy. For one thing, it involves too much speculation. The second coming of Christ at some unknown date in the future is far too speculative

a fact to mean much to me. Nobody knows what the future holds. Its doors are firmly closed. When will he come? He has been expected on so many occasions, and the disappointed watchers have always gone home without him. If he comes, how will he come? In the form and shape of a Jewish carpenter dressed in the clothes of the first century? If not in this familiar fashion, how will he appear? (My experience is that the great things in life do not repeat themselves.) When he comes, how will he end the world? Will he blow it up, or burn it up, or sublimate it?

I would not like to have to answer these questions, and while I realize that life is full of unanswerable questions, when it comes to a matter like the hope of the world, I want something more than a speculation to rest my hopes on.

Besides that consideration, I am not prepared to admit defeat as far as this world goes. Perhaps if I lived in a country where things were much more difficult, I would feel differently. But living as an American Christian, I am not yet prepared to say that the only hope of the world is the end of it. I love it too much to think that the only thing that God can do to it is to wipe it out. I know that it is full of sin and cruelty, but I know also that it is full of incredible beauty, and sometimes it produces, in the most unexpected places, the most amazing goodness. I have great regard for some of the theologians who hold this view of the Christian hope, but I am in complete sympathy with Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr when he said something like this about the Second Coming of Christ: 'If he takes the Second Coming literally, it is too

naïve for the sophisticated American to take seriously, and if he takes it mythologically, it is too sophisticated for his naïve mind to grasp.'

At the other extreme, there are Christians who believe that the hope of the world is in a better world here and now. They are pinning their hopes on the fact that gradually Christians can improve the world they live in. The future is simply the working out of the implications of what has happened in the past. There will be no catastrophic event like the Second Coming of Christ; there will be only the plodding, persisting efforts of his faithful followers through the ages.

This doesn't satisfy me either. If it all depends on us, we might as well give up now. It is such an uphill job, and the stubborn resistance of human nature, with its selfishness and stupidity, makes any great degree of success almost impossible. We have had two thousand years, and we have gotten as far as poisoned gas and the atomic bomb. At that rate of speed, we cannot expect to get very far very soon.

I am quite sure that by far the great majority of Christians feel that the true interpretation of their hope lies somewhere between these extreme views. Most of the great truths about life are paradoxical. They involve apparent contradictions. So is the truth about our hope. It includes something other-worldly that the second coming represents, and it also includes something this-worldly that the gradual conversion of the world to Christ represents.

Perhaps we can put it in a parable. Imagine a small backwoods community that is almost entirely cut off

from the rest of the world, so much so that it has never had electricity. The only light they have to brighten the night is the light of a candle. But the people in this community are not so isolated from the civilized world that they have not heard about electricity; and the more forward-looking members of the community are constantly promising the rest of the people that some day electricity will come and brighten the town. And they wait, year after year, for the coming of this wondrous thing that will banish the darkness. But it never comes. Then a stranger comes from the outside world and sees the situation. He hears the promise of the coming of electricity. He turns to the people and says, 'Electricity has come! It came more than a hundred and fifty years ago, but you've got to bring it to this town. You've got to learn the laws by which it operates. You've got to pay the price by which you can bring it across streams, through woods and over mountains. You've got to go through the effort and expense of wiring your houses and public buildings.' Stirred by his words, they set about to do what he says. They learn the laws, and they do the work, and they wire the houses. And then they turn the main switch, and there is light! By their own efforts? Partly, but not solely. The light shone because electricity came once and comes again, and keeps coming wherever men co-operate with its laws and yield themselves to be its faithful channels. When it comes, it does more in a minute than all the men in the town could do in a lifetime, and yet without the men it does not come.

You see the meaning of my little parable. People are sitting in darkness; for some of them the darkness is great.

People are telling them that sometime Christ will come and put an end to their darkness. What I should like to tell them is that Christ *has already come*. He came in the flesh so that men could see and touch him. He came in the spirit so that men everywhere could get into him, so to speak, and he could get into them. But they have to bring him to their town, to the situation which is troubling them. They have got to learn the laws by which his life operates. They have got to surrender themselves to the discipline by which they may become the clear channels through which his life may flow. They have got to wire their houses, so to speak, and bring him into the very heart of life's most urgent problems. And when they do, Christ comes. The situation will be saved. By their efforts? Partly, but not solely, for when he comes, he can redeem more in a minute than they can in a century, if ever.

When people do that, and they often do, what happens? They don't do away with all the evil in the world any more than the men who bring electricity to a town banish the darkness. They do not destroy evil. They master it momentarily! And in doing so, they reveal a world that is over and above and beyond this world.

That, according to my way of thinking, and my way of thinking represents a large group of Christians in the world, is exactly where the Christian hope lies. Not in a collision in which one world wipes out another, but in a penetration, and infiltration if you will, of one world by another far greater world beyond. Who can say that the men and women who have set out to improve the hopeless conditions created by child labor, slavery, dis-

ease, and insanity have not made the world better, and in doing it have not made such a total response to life that they have given and gotten a glimpse of another world that is always pressing in upon this world?

Whether that perfect world will someday come and utterly destroy and displace this one, I do not know. It may and it may not. Personally, I am not greatly concerned about it. I am willing to leave that in God's hands. What I do care about is this, that whatever the situation is, wherever men and women are willing to let Christ come through them, he comes now, and brings into this world glimpses and refreshments from his own world that is free and beautiful and good. If I can have that kind of hope, I am perfectly willing to leave the matter of a perfect world, and the consummation of history, and the so-called Second Coming of Christ to the speculations of the theologians.

Where, then, lies the Christian hope of the world? In Christ Jesus, who has come, and keeps coming and will come. It lies also in the men of good will — the people who can swallow their pride and fall on their knees; who can forgive and are big enough to be forgiven; who can tame their tempers and endure humiliation for Christ's sake; who can give themselves and never be spent; who can be good without losing their sense of humor; who can be tender without losing their backbone; who can be hopeful without losing their common sense. This little group, in whom Christ dwells, they are with him the hope of the world.

THE WORLD TO COME

There are two major insights into the mystery of the life beyond. One comes from the Greeks, the other from the Hebrews. Let's look at both of them. The Greeks watched a man releasing a homing pigeon from his cage, and watched that pigeon spiral tentatively upward until he came to a height from which he could spot some familiar landmark, then the pigeon made his way homeward with an incredible precision and an unerring sense of direction. Now that, said the Greeks, is what death is like. The spirit of man is captured in the cage of his body, in a strange and unfamiliar, and in many ways uncongenial, world, and when death comes the cage is opened, so to speak, and the spirit is released and goes instinctively homeward to its Maker. In other words, the view that the Greeks took of this great matter is that death is the release of the spirit from the body.

The Hebrews, on the other hand, a very different sort of people, not abstract in their thinking, but practical, concrete, historical rather than philosophical, watched a man put a seed in the ground. They knew that within a few days or a week the seed would completely disappear

and die; and they knew also that as they watched the place where the seed was placed the life in the seed would reappear in a new form appropriate to the new life above ground; that nature would give it a new body. That, they said, is what death is like. It is not so much the release of the spirit from the body as it is the resurrection of the body for a completely new life.

The Greeks put their faith in the inherent capacity of the human soul to survive death. The Hebrews put their faith in the power of God to give a man a new body so that he could live a new life. The Greeks talk about the immortality of the soul, and the Hebrews about the resurrection of the body. Both are insights into the truth, and I personally think it is a mistake to claim that either one, alone and by itself, is the only and exclusive way to the truth. A truth as great as this must inevitably have many avenues of approach, and these two together make one of the great comprehensions of this mystery.

The Hebrew insight has a great deal to commend it. In the first place, it is completely realistic about the world. The Hebrews were always willing to acknowledge the fact that while we are not completely fulfilled in the life we live now, while we thirst for the things that we never get in this life, while in one sense we are pilgrims and sojourners here, nevertheless, this world is our home. God made it for us and in many ways we are extremely well adapted to it. We love it, we enjoy it, and it is not something that we think of as a cage to get out of. The Hebrews were also extremely realistic in that they admitted that the world, as we understand it and enjoy it, will come to an end and that we will die. They

did not see any inherent capacity in man that would make him immortal. When he died, he died — like the seed in the ground.

Also, the Hebrew insight has this to commend it. It promises a completely real life in the next world; that is, a life of personal identity that is recognizable. That is why, I suppose, they put so much emphasis on the resurrection of the body, because if it were not for our bodies we wouldn't recognize one another. There would be no way to establish our identity, and the Jews, and the Christians following them, wanted to say, if there is any life beyond this — we know that it isn't proven, but if there is any — if it is worth looking forward to at all, it is a life of personal identity in which a personality is known for the person he is. Otherwise, it is nothing but a shadowy existence that no one would look forward to at all.

We certainly do not expect the next world to be an exact reproduction of this one, heaven forbid! But we do expect to get some hints about it here. That is, if the principles that are locally valid, and this is one of the platforms on which the scientists stand, if the principles that are locally valid here are also universally valid, then we can expect to get some clues about the next world from life here. We move always from the known to the unknown, not with complete certainty but with the assurance that if we take seriously the known facts they will give us little inklings, here and there, of the unknown. If in this life personal relationships count for so much, there is every reason to suppose that they will in the next.

I think that almost everyone would agree that were it

not for the relationships with people, this life would not be worth the effort, and the older we grow, the more we appreciate that fact. As we look back over the years, the brightest spots are the people we have known and loved, and if we cannot even imagine eliminating what is such an integral part of the life we have known here, we have some right to expect that under some form the same kind of thing will exist in the next world.

The implication, at least, is that you will know the people that you love. One of the questions people ask me over and over again is, Will I know him? I have no special knowledge about these things other than the faith that has come to me and the inferences and revelations that have been granted to the fellowship of Christians through the years, but on the basis of all those things, I am perfectly sure that in some way, not understood by us at present, you will know him.

In the story of the walk to Emmaus, there is a real clue to this mystery. In the story the disciples overtake their risen Master and do not recognize him because, though he is in some physical form, apparently it is not the body they were accustomed to, and therefore they think he is a stranger. During the course of their walking with him, and talking and listening to him, and finally having supper with him, 'their eyes were opened, and they knew him.' They knew him because they loved him, and if that can happen in this world, I for one do not quite see why we have not every right to expect that it will happen in the next.

The person you love, therefore, does not simply exist in God's presence, but he lives a real, recognizable life.

It was in this spirit, and in the light of this faith, that the young Benjamin Franklin, who at that time was a printer in Philadelphia, wrote an epitaph that was later put up on his grave, and this is what he wrote:

> The Body of B. Franklin, Printer,
> (Like the Cover of an old Book,
> its Contents torn out, And stript
> of its Lettering, and Gilding)
> Lies here, Food for Worms.
> But the Work shall not be lost;
> for it will (as he believ'd)
> appear once more In a new and
> more elegant Edition, Revised and
> corrected, by the Author.

Some people want to know more than what I have tried to tell them in answer to their questions. They want to know when all this is going to happen, how it is going to happen, what about all the other people we are going to meet, if we meet people we know in the other world? Will it go on forever, and what about my sins? On the whole, when Christians have tried to answer this kind of curiosity they have usually floundered. St. Paul did it better than anyone else, and yet even he, when he tried to describe in detail the nature of the General Resurrection, was not altogether satisfactory. (You feel the frail vessel of his thought begin to sink before it is barely launched.) Christ, on the other hand, through his evangelist and interpreter, St. John, came out so much better when he said, 'In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a

place for you; that where I am there ye may be also.' No details in that, no time schedule; simply, 'where I am there ye may be also.'

Jesus himself never talked much about life after death. In answering the question about the seven brothers who had the same wife, he made it quite clear that the relationships after death are not exactly the same as they are in this life. 'When they shall rise from the dead,' he said, 'they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.' He was content to rest in the positive affirmation that God is the God of the living and not of the dead. He immersed people in the love of God here and now and encouraged them to leave the future in his hands.

That seems to me the wise and sound way for us to travel. In one of Phillips Brooks's great sermons he said this: 'We can forego the detailed knowledge of the circumstances and occupations of the other life, if only we can fully know two things — that the dead are, and that they are with God. All beside these two things we can most willingly leave undiscovered.'

Personally, I am glad that Christianity at its best has no quick, easy, and glib answers to give to people who ask about the dead — what happens to them, where are they, will we meet them again? There is too much mystery involved to be too facile with our answers. The broad, bold affirmations of Christianity — that the dead are, and that they are with God — are much more in keeping with the majestic dimensions of the subject. In the strength of them, we can pick up our lives and get on with our task, and not waste our emotional energy asking unanswerable questions and trying to figure out

things which God has kept to himself. When he wants us to know more, he will not hesitate to tell us. Until then, we rest in confidence that the dead are with him.

In an eastern university on the tomb of a man and wife who were both professors of astronomy in that university there is the inscription: 'We have loved the stars too dearly to be fearful of the night.' What a story that tells about their life together, about the major interest of their life, and about their attitude toward the mysteries not yet revealed. If you change just one word in it, it could be the inscription for many a Christian life: 'We have loved God too dearly to be fearful of the night.'

PART TWO

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

This chapter is about the presence of God, and it is intended especially for those who seldom, if ever, feel the presence of God yet wish they did. They believe that there is a God. When they look at the universe around them, it makes good sense to them to assume that there is something behind it all. They believe there is a Supreme Being they call God, just as they believe the earth goes around the sun. But they do not feel God the way they feel the warmth of the sun on their body, and they wish they did. They have friends who do, not many perhaps, but some friends to whom the presence of God is just as real as the presence of any human being in their immediate circle. They are aware of the comfort and strength derived from that sense of the presence of God, but *they* do not experience it. What can we say to them?

This may be said first. You will never feel the presence of God in exactly the same way you feel the presence of the sun or the presence of the person sitting next to you. The presence of God is a different sort of thing. It is not a physical, material, tangible, visible reality. It is unseen.

You feel it the way you feel the presence of St. Francis when you stand in the little portico of San Damiano in Assisi and look into the garden where he wrote the Canticle of the Sun. When you look up and down the Umbrian Valley and at the hills crowned with their white, sparkling towns, then you feel the presence of Francis. Or, the way that some of you may feel when you go into a group of people who are on fire with some great cause; you see the people, but you feel the presence of the spirit that is in those people, and which is over and above and beyond the people themselves.

In other words, the presence of God is something that you feel within you as well as outside you. It becomes so real to some people that they talk about it as though the presence of God was as discernible as the presence of Mary Jones, and some of us are likely to get discouraged when we do not have an experience like that. We probably never shall have it in that very realistic way because the presence of God is something quite different, less tangible, more inward, less outward, something that you feel inside yourself.

It depends more or less, I suppose, this feeling of the presence of God, on at least three things. The first is *where you are*. Most of you would agree that you are more likely to feel the presence of Thomas Jefferson when you are in Monticello than when you are in Copley Square. It is true to say that Jefferson's spirit is just as present in Copley Square as it is in Monticello, but there in the house that he planned and so carefully executed and in which he lived for so many years, there in that place so intimately associated with him you feel his pres-

ence in a way that you never feel it in any other place. In the same way, you are more likely to feel the presence of Shakespeare on the streets of Stratford than you are in Times Square, New York. You are more likely to feel the presence of the personality of Jesus here at his table when we celebrate his Last Supper than you are in the South Station. He is just as much present in the South Station as he is here, but in these particular surroundings, with the associations that evoke the memories and experiences of the past, you are more likely to be aware of his presence. Just so, you are more likely to feel the presence of God in some places than in others.

For some people, it will be out of doors. I have expressed on occasion my impatience with people who pretend to worship God on the golf course Sunday mornings; I am sure it is possible, but not probable! But there are people who find God most often in the natural world, and particularly in the spring when everything is fresh and new, and all blooming things are abloom. If you make any sort of response to this kind of natural splendor, you are likely to feel the presence of God in the open country more than you are in the alleys of cities lined with bricks and mortar and surrounded by a good deal of ugliness.

For some, of course, the place is a church, like this one, set apart; everything in it suggests the presence of God; you might say the place is charged with the presence of God. You look at the altar, and immediately you think of the life of Jesus that has been given for you, poured out for many. You look at the cross, and you think of the love that never fails and will not let you go. You

look at the Bible and you think of the Word of God that has nourished you and stood by you in difficult times. You look at the pulpit; you may have tender and powerful associations with other men who have stood in it in other generations. You look at the pews and you can see the people who have come and gone, whom you have loved, and with whom you have had the closest and most intimate relationships in life. These things, you see, are charged with the presence of God. They are not the presence. God is just as much present in the alley in back of the rectory as he is in this church, but these things evoke the presence. They minister to our material necessities, creatures of matter that we are, so that our memories and our imaginations are quickened and illuminated by these things which bring the presence of God closer to us than it would otherwise be.

So the first suggestion I shall make, and it is a simple one, to people who wish that the presence of God was more real to them than it is, is that they find the place or the places in which the presence of God is most likely to be felt by them, and then pursue that place and visit it on regular occasions, and sit there quietly, or stand there, and let God make himself known.

The second thing that has something to do with our feeling of the presence of God is *what we are like*. Some people, as you know, are much more sensitive than others, sensitive in general or sensitive to a particular thing. It has always interested me that some people have an unusually keen sense of smell, so much so that if led blindfolded into a European city that they know well, they would know where they were by the odor. There are

others who would not have any idea where they were because they have not that particular sensitivity. Some people have an eye for beauty; they can see a bare branch and be stirred to the depths by the beauty of its line and form, while others see nothing but a dead tree. Some people have an ear for music, and others do not. Phillips Brooks did not, so no one need apologize for it if he has not the capacity to respond to great music. Some people are not born with that precious sensitivity.

Just so some people, at least it seems this way to me, have a particular gift for God. They are more sensitive to the things of the spirit; they are more likely to feel the presence of God in all sorts of places and under various circumstances and conditions than other people are. There are people like Brother Lawrence who went about his work washing the pots and pans to the glory of God. Most of us could not, or at least do not, do that. There are people like the mystics for whom the reality of God is much closer, much more vivid, than the people who live around them. I am not like that and I think many of you may not be like that. We are not made that way. We do not have the necessary equipment for that kind of sensitivity. Some of us have it, of course, but have never developed it. That is another story.

Suppose, then, you have not a particular gift for God; you are an ordinary person with an average degree of sensitivity to the things of God. Is there anything you can do about it, or must you always go on the way you are? Do not forget this, there is no human being who has no capacity for God. That could never be proved, and perhaps you will not accept it as a general statement,

but I am willing to make it, and I am willing to stand by it. There are people who are tone-deaf, and there are people who are color-blind, but I for one do not believe that there is any human being who is absolutely deaf or blind to God. In the dullest person I have ever known, there has been some latent capacity to feel and to know and to love God. Perhaps it has never been stirred, perhaps it has not been cultivated, but it is there. When you are sometimes sorry for yourself and say to yourself, Well, I don't feel this because I do not have that particular sensitivity, you must also say to yourself, But I have some degree of sensitivity because every human being has it, and my job is to develop the capacity that I do have.

If, for instance, you have not the capacity for what I call the lyric sense of God, as Francis had, seeing God in everything, practically all the time, if you do not have that, do not grieve over it and think that you have no way to feel and know the presence of God. If you do not have the lyric sense, perhaps you have the practical sense. You may feel the presence of God in the duty that you have to do and the obligation you owe to your family as you go about that duty. That may be as near to God's presence as you will ever come. Then cleave to that.

The third thing on which this depends to a great degree is *how often you stop to think about God.* You could live in Concord, Massachusetts, from now until doomsday and never be aware of or feel the presence of people like Emerson, or Thoreau, or Bronson Alcott, or Nathaniel Hawthorne, if you never stopped to think about them. If you were always on the go, pursuing your various duties and obligations, and never gave a thought to what

they did or what they said or what they wrote, you would never be aware of their presence in the town. The same thing is true about God. And one of the reasons why you and I are not more aware of the presence of God than we are is not that we lack the sensitivity of the mystics; it is a much more humiliating reason, namely, that we very seldom take time to think about him one way or the other. Take the past week in your life and run through it briefly. Let me suggest to you the moment and the points at which the presence of God was unusually close to you, and ask yourself whether, at the time, you ever stopped long enough to think about him or to realize that you were in the presence of God.

We shall begin at the very beginning. Every day during the week you got up in the morning when the daylight came and got yourself dressed and had your breakfast. Where did the energy and the vitality come from that enabled you to rouse out of your slumber and return once again to the routine of your work — where did the energy come from? Did you make it? Could you create it? Where did the food come from that fed you in the morning and refueled your body so that you could go about your round again? Could you grow a single blade of wheat? What is that but the presence of God? And if we would only stop a few minutes to think of it in the morning, and say, I thank my God for the life that he has given me this day, his presence would become more real to us than it is.

And then, after you got dressed and ready to go out, you went about your business, whatever it is. Even though it may not have been a prominent task, never-

theless, it must have been something that you felt was worth doing, and you did it with a kind of commitment and a sense of purpose as though it had meaning, and your life as a whole had meaning as you tried to fulfill your task that day. Where did that sense of meaning come from? Where did the fact that you thought you were fulfilling some sort of purpose — whether it was a humble purpose or a spectacular one, it makes no difference — where did that sense of purpose, destiny, and meaning come from? That is the presence of God in your life.

Some days, perhaps, you got up and did not want to do the thing that you were supposed to do, but you did it. And some days you may not have wanted to do it, and you did not, and you regret it. What do you think that magnet of obligation is? What is it that pulls you away from the things that you would like to do on the lower levels of your life and gives you the incentive to do the things that you know you ought to do even though they are not going to be for your pleasure or your profit at the moment? What is it? It is the pole star of the power of the magnetic, moral God and you are in the presence of God when you feel that kind of thing tugging at your life.

Certainly, some time during the week you saw or heard things that were incredibly beautiful. They are like the dividends of life. I never cease to wonder at them, and nothing in my case makes me more conscious of the presence of God than they do. The necessities of life in themselves are wonderful and an indication of God's provident care, but the extravagances of God are the things that come over you like waves of feeling and make you

realize his presence. The sun is a necessity, but the splendor of the sunset is just thrown in for the joy and the beauty of it! It is like the banners that barely hide the presence of God.

Perhaps during the week you had something to do which as you faced it, you thought quite honestly and frankly you could not do. You shrank from it; you thought that it was beyond your powers. When the time came you did it. Where do you think the power that made it possible for you to do it came from? What is the source of that extra energy that comes at times when we need it? It is the presence of God in a man's life. Again, during the week you have been with people, sometimes a great many and sometimes not so many, people whom you love and who mean all the world to you, and who love you, and you know that nothing that you would ever do to them could change their affection or their loyalty, that they would never waver, that you could depend upon them until doomsday. When you take time to think about that kind of relationship, that kind of love, does it ever occur to you that that kind of love must have a greater source, that it is an echo of the Love that moves the sun and all the others stars, that if you are looking for the signs of the presence of God, there is no more valid or stirring one that you could possibly see than the love of your friends who stand by you through thick and thin?

You have enjoyed things during the week; you have done things that you loved to do and these, too, are signs of the presence of God. You have had hard times, blows have fallen, perhaps, and you have realized that even in

the darkness and the shadows, there is the presence of God that you never counted on ordinarily, and that you found even in the dark, light. These are some of the things which as you become aware of them, and stop to think about them long enough, make you more and more conscious of the presence of God.

Where you are, what you are like, and how often you stop to think about God — these things will determine how real God's presence becomes to you. There is a line which you might write in your memory and keep there when these things seem far away and remote from you. It is from St. Paul's great sermon to the Athenians in the Book of Acts: 'He is not far from each of us; for in him we live and move and have our being.'

DEPENDING ON GOD

One of the things that religious people talk a lot about is dependence upon God. I talked about it myself recently to a group of students, and when I finished one of them asked the question, 'Isn't it possible to be *too* dependent upon God?' That is a natural question for a student to ask for he is in the very act of discovering and asserting his own independence. Moreover, this particular student was an American, and Americans above everything else like to be independent. They like to stand on their own feet, fight their own battles, pay their own way, and, if they happen to be New Englanders, they don't like to be beholden to anybody, human or divine!

As a matter of fact, you yourself, if you spoke what was really on your mind, might be a little suspicious of the psalmist who wrote the ninety-first psalm. 'I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust.' If it were the psalm for the day you would read it along with the rest of the congregation and make no audible comment. But in your mind, you might very well make this reservation, that the psalmist might

have done better if he had trusted God a little less and done a little more himself. God helps those who help themselves, you would say to yourself, as a good American Protestant, and then go about your way, secretly proud of the fact that you were not depending on God to do the things that any self-respecting man or woman ought to do for himself.

So this question raised by the student is worth our serious consideration. Isn't it possible to be too dependent upon God? The answer, of course, is Yes and No. If you depend on God, for instance, to get you through an examination the next day, and you have not opened any of the books required for the course, you are depending on God altogether too much. If you depend on God to save a man who has been struck down by a truck and is bleeding to death, and do nothing whatsoever to stop the bleeding, then of course you are depending on him far too much. If you depend on God to clean up a slum and lift not a finger to improve the sanitation, tear down the tenements, and change the legislation, you are obviously depending too much on God.

But if *after* and *while* you do everything you can in a situation, you depend on God, you cannot depend on him too much, because everything you are and everything you have or can ever hope to be comes ultimately from him. From him your life, your thoughts, your imagination, and your energy are all derived. Take a man sailing a boat. If he depends upon the wind to such an extent that he does not do a single thing to raise the sail, you could say that he is depending upon the wind too much. But if, after and while raising his sail and care-

fully adjusting it to the wind, he depends on the wind in the sense that he knows he could not move an inch without it, and knows that to the degree to which he understands it and co-operates with the wind will he sail forward, then he cannot depend on the wind too much.

This raises another question. Where does the whole idea of depending upon God come from? Quite obviously, it is not something thought up by older people to make life difficult for the younger generation. It comes right out of our human situation and experience, just as naturally and spontaneously as the grass comes out of the earth.

We are born completely helpless. No one can deny that. We have to be fed, washed, clothed, carried about, and even turned over. We learn very quickly, however, to do these things for ourselves and, if we happen to be brought up in America, we are taught from the very beginning that the more we can do for ourselves the better. In fact, we get to the point where we can do so much for ourselves that we often forget that there are some things we cannot do. We can make a cup of coffee, but we cannot make a coffee bean. We can build houses and keep them in order, but we cannot make the wood or the stone that our houses are made of, or by ourselves produce the energy that goes into the keeping of them. We can dress a wound, but we cannot heal it. We can bear a child, but we cannot make one. We can split the atom, but we cannot stop the atom from splitting the world in two if we use it in the wrong way.

In an article celebrating the anniversary of transatlantic broadcasting, a newspaper columnist reminded

us of the phrase that we heard so often when transatlantic broadcasting was young: 'Due to atmospheric conditions over which we have no control, our commentator from Paris will not be heard at this time.' He then went on to say, 'The phrase had and still has a ring of adventure to it, a graceful submission to larger forces.' Sooner or later, we must make that submission to the larger forces upon which we are dependent, and the more graceful that submission is, the better. If you are still holding out, too proud to admit that there is anything beyond your powers and too stubborn to acknowledge the fact that you are absolutely and utterly dependent upon God for the very breath you draw and the thoughts you think, get down on your knees now and say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress: my God, in him will I trust.'

Don't think that only the pious are conscious of their dependence upon God. D. H. Lawrence, the English essayist, poet, and novelist, was just about as far from being pious as anyone I can think of, but listen to what he has to say about his own experience along these lines. 'I often think that one ought to pray before one works and then leave it to the Lord. I always feel as though I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me.' He was so much of an artist that he knew from the beginning that he was an agent of communication and that all his creative talents were channels through which came something from beyond. On that something from beyond he was completely dependent.

One of the most interesting people in American history, at least to my way of thinking, is Benjamin Frank-

lin. His friends thought of him as a freethinker; he belonged to no church and subscribed to no creed. When the convention was meeting to frame the Constitution of the United States, they were amazed when he stood up in the convention and made a resolution that each session begin with prayer. 'The longer I live,' he said, 'the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men.' As a man of the world, sophisticated, urbane, cosmopolitan, he recognized the fact that human life was dependent upon the God who made it.

There is still another question that this whole subject raises: 'What sort of help can we expect?' The man who wrote the ninety-first psalm expected a lot. He expected nothing less than immunity against all disaster. If the plague came, it would not strike his house. If war was declared, it would not take his life. Others might fall by the thousands in its battles but he would stand unharmed. Traps might be laid all through the woods by the hunters, but he would not be caught. Because he trusted in God, no evil would happen to him and no plague would come near his dwelling.

We wonder about this. We have known people who trusted in God and depended on him consistently year in and year out, yet their house *has* been struck by the plague, their boy *has* been killed in the wars, they *have* been caught by the traps of disease and disappointment. As a matter of fact, it often seems to us that the very people who seemed to trust in God most suffered the worst disasters.

And yet, there is something in what the psalmist be-

lieved, for the man who loses himself in something greater than himself has a greater power of resistance. When Gandhi was a young man in South Africa, the country was struck by the pneumonic plague, a plague far more deadly than the bubonic plague. Gandhi gathered around him four other young Indians and together they nursed the African Negroes through the plague. People around them were dying by the thousands, but not one of them was touched. In his modesty, Gandhi attributed his immunity to the fact that he ate very little food while the plague lasted, but I wonder whether there isn't something more to it. When a man completely submerges himself in some great interest which he trusts and to which he is glad to give everything he is and has, he sometimes seems to have almost superhuman powers of resistance. I think we can say, in fairness to all the facts, that the more you trust in God and forget yourself, the more likely you are to stave off the inroads of disaster.

The reason for it, I suppose, is that such trust eliminates fear. A person who really trusts in God is not a fearful person. Fear is something like a lightning rod; it draws disaster to itself. But unlike the lightning rod, it does not drain the disaster off into the ground where it can do no harm; rather, it concentrates it where it can do the most damage.

But there is another kind of help that we need even more. It is the help that gets us through troubles when they come. We cannot promise people that if they trust in God they will never have any trouble. But we can promise that if they trust in him, whatever strength they need to get them through trouble when it comes will be

given them. Many of you are facing situations right now which seem far beyond your powers to meet. Some of you are carrying burdens that are just too heavy for you to carry much longer. You know that by yourself, alone, you cannot carry on. Your resources are by no means adequate for the task.

If you are in such a predicament, sit quietly and let these words sink deep into your subconscious mind. God will never ask you to do anything that is beyond *his* strength. It may be beyond yours, but not his. Drop your burden for a moment; relax your nerves; let your body go limp. Feel the tide of his power flow into you the way the sea flows into the inlets that are ready to receive it. Say to yourself this Negro prayer: 'O Lord, help me to understand that you ain't going to let nuthin' come my way that you and me together can't handle.'

Such is real dependence upon God, not so much to spare you as to strengthen you. Remember that when Jesus prayed in the garden that God might spare him the pain of death, his prayer was not answered, at least not in the way he hoped it might be. But 'there appeared an angel strengthening him.' Sometimes that is the best answer God can give.

PRAYER

There is bound to come a time, sooner or later, when you want something desperately, and you know that you cannot get it by your own efforts. Someone you love is sick and you want him to get well; you may be sick yourself and want to get well; or you are out of a job and you want one; or you have lost your grip on life and you want to get it back. When that time comes, you pray and ask God to give you the thing you so desperately want. You may be in the habit of praying regularly every day, the way you eat your meals three times a day, or you may pray only occasionally. But whether you are in the habit of praying or not, when a time like this comes, you will pray almost instinctively, simply because you cannot help it. You may not pray according to any liturgical form or pattern, but you will turn in your helplessness to whatever gods there be and ask for help.

Two things are likely to happen. If you pray for what you want and you don't get it, and you certainly will not always get it, you are likely to give up prayer and to say that you tried it once when you needed help badly and it

didn't work. You discard it as an outworn and ineffective instrument. If, on the other hand, you do get what you want, and you most certainly will sometimes get what you ask for, you are likely thereafter to use prayer to prevail upon God to do something which you think he would not otherwise do.

Both results are bad. To give up prayer leaves you that much poorer and deprives you of one of the great resources of life. It cuts you off from one of the main streams of energy. And on the other hand, to use prayer makes you proud and presumptuous and puts you in the position of presuming to dictate to the Almighty and telling him what he ought to do. There are many sincere people who have such absolute faith in the power of their prayer that they often appear, at least, to think that they have the power to control the forces over which God alone is the ruler.

Both of these undesirable results seem to me to stem from a mistake that you made in the beginning, and the mistake was in thinking that prayer is a way to get something that you want, like a child's letter to Santa Claus. It isn't.

It is true that you often get something as a result of your prayer, but that's not at all the same thing as saying that you pray *in order* to get it. That is a distinction with a real difference. I know that some of you will be thinking of some of the things that Jesus said about prayer, like 'Ask and it shall be given to you,' and 'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' Regardless of the apparent meaning of single sentences like those, from the total picture of Jesus that we get in the Gospels I am

sure that Jesus did not think of prayer primarily as a way of getting God to do something.

If the primary purpose of prayer is not to get something, what is it? The purpose is to *be* with someone. Prayer is the cultivation and expression of a relationship. The primary purpose of prayer is to be with God.

In one sense, of course, we are with God all the time. Perhaps we should like to get away from him occasionally, and go off on our own. It would be a great relief for some people not to be continually in God's presence. It would be less embarrassing for them. Nevertheless, there they are. 'Thou art about my path and about my bed, and art acquainted with all my ways.' That we are in the presence of God continually is one of the most reassuring and at the same time one of the most frightening thoughts that can pass through our minds.

But, you see, though we are with God all the time, we are not by any means conscious of him all the time unless we deliberately stop to think about him. It is something like the sun. We are in the sun all the time, when you come to think of it, even in the long spells of cloudy weather. We live and breathe because of the vitality that comes to us from the sun. If the sun burned out, we would disappear instantly. Even at night, when we don't see the sun, we live by the warmth that manages to get around to our side of the darkened globe. As the Psalmist said when he was writing about the sun running his race like a strong man, 'there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.' And there isn't, for the sun's rays can pierce the thickest walls and go straight to the bowels

of the earth, so that no matter where you go or what you do, you never get away from it.

But you are not always thinking about it. You may happen to notice it today if you have been having several weeks of overcast weather, but normally you don't think very much about it. You don't look up in the sky every morning to see if it is there; you take for granted that it's there and go about your way in the light of it. But there are times when you *do* look at it. If you get up unusually early in the morning, you stop to look at the sun rising in all its early morning splendor. And if you are interested in astronomy, you look at it because you know that you cannot understand the ways of this planet of ours unless you understand them in relation to the heavenly bodies, and it therefore behooves you to look at the sun deliberately, fixedly, carefully, and to learn its ways.

God is something like the sun. We don't think of him most of the time because we are busy thinking about the things he has given us to do, our homes and jobs, our interests and activities. And I am sure that is what God wants. I can't believe that God wants us to be thinking about him all the time. But there are times when we *must* stop to think about him, and think of our lives in reference to him, and see ourselves in relation to and against the background of infinity and eternity. For if it is true that we cannot understand the movements of the earth apart from its relationship to the heavenly bodies, how much more is it true that we cannot understand our little fragmentary lives apart from him who is the source and goal of all life. And it isn't only a matter

of understanding, but of enjoyment as well. The sun gives us not only existence but enjoyment in its finest sense. God gives us not only life, but he himself makes that life wonderful and good. We would be foolish to miss the delight that his presence can give us.

Prayer, therefore, in its most elementary sense, is simply stopping to think about God. It's a great deal more than that, don't forget, but that's a good place to begin. And it's a hard place for us Americans to begin, for it is almost impossible for us to stop what we are doing. We are on the go practically all the time, and we are likely to think that there is something virtuous about being busy. We have almost come to believe that the busier a person is the better he is. People even apply that thinking to ministers. If a minister isn't rushing from one committee meeting to another, running all the social agencies in town, and looking as though he never really caught his breath, people are likely to think that he doesn't amount to much. They seldom stop to think that anyone as busy as that is not likely to have time to think about God. Busy people must not be surprised when they do not find the divine fragrance in his presence.

Granted that we are able to accomplish the feat of bringing ourselves to a stop, what do we think about? How can we think about someone we can't see? Many of you do it all the time. Someone you love, for some reason or other, is in another part of the world, or perhaps has moved on into the next world. You don't think about him all the time. You can't. You have too many other things that have to be done. It wouldn't be natural

if you did. You go about your normal life. But there are times, times too precious to describe, when you do think about him, even though you can't see him. If it's someone you have lived with, all his things remind you of him. Most of the time you don't particularly notice them, but when you want to think of him, you let your eyes linger upon them, and you let them tell you about him, his books, his clothes, his pipe, his favorite knickknacks. They all say something about him. And then, if he is still living, you get letters from him every once in a while, messages, in which he tells you about himself, what he's doing, and what he hopes to do. And, of course, you have a picture of him, and once in a while you get it out. It brings the face back to you; not that you need a picture to remind you, but it does, nevertheless. You can almost hear him speak.

This will be your experience when you stop to think about God. His creations remind you of him, if you let them. You think of the sea, and it reminds you of the vastness of God. You think of the hills, and they remind you of his steadfastness. You look at the stars, and you think of his beauty and power. You see the things growing in the fields, and you think of his life. But suppose you live in the city, perhaps in one room. You can't look at the sea, or at the hills, and perhaps not even at the stars, certainly not at the fields. What then can you see that will remind you of God the way a man's belongings bring him close to those who love him? Look at the wood in your furniture. Where did it come from? Think of the tree before it fell, one of God's most perfect creations. What must God be like if he can produce a tree? Think

of the seed when it fell in the ground, and how through the years it grew, silently, slowly, continually, so much from so little. And if you can't stretch your imagination that far, put your finger on your own pulse and feel the steady beat of it. Don't worry whether it's going too fast or too slow. The point is that it's beating. What makes it beat? It is God's power that pulses through you and through every living thing; the same power that pumps your blood pulls the stars across the sky.

You can see that you have to take time with this sort of thing. You can't do it on the run. You can train yourself to do it almost anywhere and in any circumstances, but first you have to take time and set aside a place where you can be quiet and uninterrupted.

We have also something comparable to a man's letters. We have the Bible, which in a very special way is God's message to us. In it he tells us as much about himself as we are ever likely to know. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the Bible is the only place where God tells us something about himself. It isn't. But it certainly is the chief place, and the place where he tells us what we most want to know about him, namely what he is like himself and what he expects us to be. This is a message worth reading if you want to think about God. And it is worth reading intelligently. Speaking now only for myself, I think I come closer to God when I actually study the Bible than when I read it in the usual way. There are parts of the Bible you can skip, and you must learn to recognize those parts and not get trapped in them. A translation of the Bible in modern English is a great help

to me and may be to you. I like to be able to read it without the distraction of a language that is elegant, to be sure, but quite remote from my everyday life and often extremely difficult to understand. As you read the Bible, let it speak to you. Learn to read between the lines. Use your imagination as you would if you received a letter from a son in Indochina. Mark it; have a copy that you feel free to mark. Make notes in the margin. Let your mind be drawn out by it. There is no better way to begin to pray than this.

We have also a picture of God. A picture of the Divine Being? Yes, I think you can call it that. Jesus Christ is for us Christians something like a picture of God. He is our visible image of the invisible God. We can trace in his character the lines of the Divine Character. When we crave the physical image, the concrete reality, Jesus answers our desire. We look through him to God, and we see behind his suffering and his goodness the infinite goodness of an infinite God.

There is just one question you might raise now. 'In the case of our loved one whom we think of, though we do not see him, we *have* seen him, and the memory of him and what he looks like and what he is like is vivid in the back of our minds. But we *have never* seen God. How then can anything recall his image to us?' It is true, we have not seen God. 'No man hath seen God at any time.' Yet, we believe that we are made in the image of God and that means, among other things, that the image of God is printed on the plate of every man's consciousness at the very beginning. Just as we recog-

nize beauty the first time we see it because somehow or other the impression of it is already in our consciousness, so we recognize God when we meet him because, in a way we do not understand, his image is there from the beginning. It may be buried; it may be covered over, but it is there waiting and ready to be brought out into the light.

What we have been saying is that prayer is first and foremost the practice of being in the presence of God. When Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, what do you suppose he was doing? Surely, he was not spending the whole night asking God for one thing or another! He was being with God, his Father, enjoying him, getting to know him, relating himself and his work to him, thinking of the whole world in relationship to its heavenly Father.

Your prayer will not mean much to you until you begin it from this end. It will take time and effort, but it will be worth it. You will have spells when you let prayer go, letting it get crowded out by all your normal responsibilities and interests. But you will come back to it, the way you come back to a person you love, to a person who feeds you. Don't worry when nothing much seems to happen. It has always been that way with people who pray, even with the great ones. Don't keep looking for results. You don't do that in one of your great human relationships. You enjoy the relationship for what it is. You do your part, and you take the results, if there be any tangible ones, with gladness and almost surprise. Why should it be different with your relationship with God? He is much more than a bank account on which you can

draw when in need. He is your Father on whom you can lean, and to whom you can turn, and for whom you can live at your best.

Does this mean that we never ask for anything in prayer? If the primary purpose of prayer is not to get something, but to be with someone, must we then never make any requests? Of course not. We do ask for things in our prayers and we shall think about that side of prayer in the next chapter.

MORE ABOUT PRAYER

The last chapter was about prayer, and the sum and substance of it was simply this, that the primary purpose of prayer is not to get something but to be with Someone. It makes me think of the way I feel on the first warm, sunny day of spring after a long, cold, dreary winter. The one thing I want to do is to get out into the sun. I want to feel the warmth of it. And so, there are many times when the one thing we need is not anything we can ask for specifically, so much as it is to get out of ourselves into the vitalizing, energizing presence of God in order to have it stream through every bit of the fabric of our being.

I cannot help saying how surprised I always am to find that there are many people to whom this is a new idea. Prayer as the practice of the presence of God has apparently been entirely displaced in their minds by the idea of prayer as a way to get God to do something for them.

The statement that the purpose of prayer is not to get something left us with a question, and the question is this: Is it wrong to ask God for something I desperately

want? For instance, if I am sick, is it wrong to ask God to make me well? Or if someone I love very much is about to make a mistake, or is in a place of mortal danger, is it wrong to ask God to save him? The answer, certainly, is No; it is not wrong. It all depends on the way you ask him to do what you want.

This whole matter will make more sense if we reduce the picture to an infinitely smaller frame and think of a small boy who wants a bicycle. He realizes he cannot get it himself; he hasn't the money to buy it and he hasn't the earning capacity at this point in his career; he knows the only source of a bicycle is his father. So he goes to his father and says, 'Dad, I want a new bicycle.' He doesn't stop to think whether his father can afford it, or whether there are other children in the family who may need other things more important than a bicycle, like a college education. He doesn't think about his father at all; he simply thinks of his own need for a bicycle, and the more he wants the bicycle, the more he keeps asking his father for it, until finally his father gives it to him, although he may not be able to afford it.

Now follow the boy and the father along a few years. The boy has grown to know his father a little better, and at this point he goes to him with the same request, but he puts it this way, 'Dad, I'd like to have a new bicycle, *if you can afford it.*' In other words, he has begun to enter into a relationship with his father, and his understanding and appreciation of his father's situation plays a part in his request, and qualifies that request to a great degree. And then, if you follow him still further along, he may go to his father and say, 'Dad, I want to go to

college, *if you think it's a good idea,'* implying that what he really wants is to do what his father thinks best. He would like to go to college if that fits in with his father's other responsibilities.

Now, you see what has happened. The relationship between the boy and the man has grown and developed. It has not eliminated the request. The boy still has a desire and still makes a request of his father. The point is that the relationship of the boy with his father comes to govern and determine the request, and it may come to the point where it will displace the request altogether because in the light of the relationship the son sees that his request is unworthy or impossible.

The religion of primitive man is similar to the small boy's relationship with his father. Primitive man wanted a 'new bicycle,' only in his case the 'bicycle' was usually rain for the crops, or sun, or fertility, or health. And when primitive man had needs like that, he turned to whatever gods he knew and said: 'These are the things we want; give them to us.' Then through the centuries, man grew to know a great deal about God, just as a boy grows to know a great deal about his parents. The boy never totally understands his parents nor do we ever totally understand God. But we enter into a deepening understanding of our parents and of God.

We know now, for instance, what the primitive man did not know, that God cares the way a parent cares. We know, also, that he cares not only for us, but also for all his creatures, and that he does not play favorites, and that he does not set one tribe over against another. And we know also what our earlier ancestors did not know,

that God has other interests besides our human interests; he has interest in all the life of the sky and the heavenly bodies, and the life of the sea, all the darkness of the oceanic world; all that is created is his concern; man is not his only concern. So that while we still make our requests of God, we make them in a very different way than we did when we were little.

That whole development came to its culminating point when Jesus faced death. He knew he was going to die, and he knew that it would happen soon. He went out into a garden the night before and he prayed, and what he said is familiar to us, so familiar that sometimes we are likely to forget that it represents the very peak to which human prayer can reach. 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but Thine be done.' There was the little boy grown up. There was the boy with the request, 'Don't let me die.' 'Take this from me, which I dread with all my human instincts!' But there was also the grown man. 'I want to do what you want. Take it from me if it is your will, but the one thing I want above everything else is not to do my will, but yours.'

In Christ's prayer, I think, is the answer to our first question, Is it wrong to ask God to do things for us? Certainly, it is not wrong, depending on the way we ask. When we are sick we ask God to make us well; but we add, 'nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.' And when our children disappoint us and fill us with anxiety that we can hardly bear, we ask God to bring them home, but we add, 'nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.' The relationship of trust is the big thing, and the

request is incidental to the relationship and must, therefore, take second place. We know that there are some things God cannot do for us and keep the rest of the family alive. We know that there are some things he will not do because he knows better than we do what is good for us. In other words, we know him, and we ask accordingly.

That leads us to another question which I am sure has been on your lips more than once. Does my asking make any difference? Suppose that all we have said is true, and it is right for us to ask God for the things we want, what difference does it make? Does it change the total situation at all? I know that there are many sincere Christians who really believe that it is rather presumptuous for them to think that the God of the universe will pay attention to their personal requests and change his ways accordingly. I think that they feel, perhaps, the way some of us would feel about writing to the President of the United States to ask him to do us a personal favor. We assume that if God could he would, but who are we to bother a person with all the interests and anxieties he has on his mind with our personal requests?

When that question begins to haunt you, and it is a worthy question, you see, because it springs from a great conception of God, remember this: our prayers, our petitionary prayers, do not *persuade* God to do something for us; they *permit* him to do it. Now that may seem to you even more presumptuous. You may say, Well, who am I to permit God to do something? Again let's reduce the matter to a very much smaller image and come back to family life. This time think of a family where there is a

child who is miserably unhappy. He is unresponsive to his parents; he is unco-operative; he doesn't fit into the pattern of family life as the other children do, and he doesn't fit into the life of his contemporaries at school. In fact, he doesn't fit anywhere. The parents of this unhappy child are helpless, and why are they helpless? Certainly not because they don't want to help him. The one thing they would rather do than anything else in the world is to help that child find himself, but they cannot. Why? Because the child will not let his parents inside himself to know what is going on in his mind. There is a block between the child and the parents' love and care; the child will not go to them and tell them what the trouble is and what he wants, and therefore the parents are helpless. The child simply will not talk to them. Once the child by some request lets his parents inside his own life, into those secret agonies of his, then all the parents' love and care, concern and advice can stream into those places and help the child to adjust himself both to his home and to his world. And you will notice that it is not the request that *makes* them reach the child; the request changes the relationship and *lets* them reach him.

Now do you see what I mean by that? The request changed the relationship and opened up all the sluices, and then the parents could do the thing that they wanted to do all the time. Certainly, if the revelation of God means anything to us, it means this, that God wants to help us in all circumstances. He is not the kind of grudging God with whom one has to plead for help. Sometimes he cannot help us the way we want because of other

considerations. For instance, he could not do for Jesus what Jesus asked him to do because of the circumstances; all the consequences of men's moral action would have been at stake if he had taken the cup away from Jesus and, thus, relieved his contemporaries of the burden of their sin and guilt. Sometimes God cannot do what we want him to do because he knows that it would not be good for us. But sometimes he cannot help us because we will not let him. There is no request in our relationship with him; there is no willingness to express our desires; there is no real dependence upon him; he doesn't know what is on our mind, so to speak. Even though he is omniscient, he has given us that amount of integrity and freedom to be ourselves. Until we let go and unburden ourselves, and say, 'Lord God, this is what I long for, these are the things I need; this is where I'm weak; do thou for me the things that I now ask,' he is unable to help us. When we ask, he can do something for us. He would have helped us before, but he couldn't do it with all the doors closed.

At this point, you say, We can see how asking for something may make a difference to the person who does the asking, but how can it make a difference to someone else? In other words, there are a great many people who can see how prayers which a man prays for himself may change his situation. They know that the prayers change his state of mind, and they could go on from there to see how they might even change his state of health. But they are not quite ready to believe that my prayer for someone in Europe, for instance, might have any power to change a situation. Such a question usually springs not

from flippant doubt but from deep and profound belief in a mighty God who is Master of all things and who does not need our interference or intervention in what he proposes and wants to do for one of his children.

Of course, it would be presumptuous for me to say that I know what the answer to this question is, or how God uses our prayers to help other people. All I can say is that I know in my heart that God can use our prayers because so many times it has happened. I can say also that my answer is not totally irrational because I know this: God can save a life on the field of battle, but sometimes he needs a pint of my blood in order to do it.

In other words, in the way God has set up the universe, there are open spaces that have to be filled by human beings in order that he may carry out his purpose. Now why he did it that way I do not know, but if it is true, as I know it is, that sometimes God needs a pint of my blood to save a life on the other side of the world, I can easily see how it may be that God sometimes needs my prayer, which is my spiritual lifeblood, to save a life that is far distant from me.

Saint Catherine of Genoa was one of the great saints of the church and one of the people who understood prayer better than most people. One evening as she was getting ready to go into the chapel a little serving maid came to her and told her that her husband was dying, the victim of a malignancy for which there was no cure. The fact that he was dying did not bother the maid as much as the fact that the pain was so great that he was dying cursing God. She came to the great Catherine to ask her to pray for the man when she went into the chapel

for evening prayers. This is the response that Catherine made to her: 'The first thing you must know is that at this very moment God is not alienated from him, and therefore cares for him more than it is possible for you or me at our very best to care for him. This is the first thing you must realize. And therefore I cannot ask God to do anything for him that God of the immense loving kindness of his heart would not do, and as he is God, is therefore doing; but what I will do is that when I go into the light, I will take him with me.'

And the story goes on to say that Catherine went into the chapel taking this poor, dying man with her into the light of the presence of God. He died, but the pain had ceased; and he died in peace and at rest with his heavenly Father. Don't ask how such a thing happened. It is enough to be reassured that it did happen, and when we go into the light, we will take with us all of those whom we know and love and who are in trouble.

This thought brings us back to the idea that we started with: the primary purpose of prayer is not to get something, but to be with Someone. Requests finally take their shape and have their power because of the relationship; if there isn't any relationship there, the requests mean nothing.

When Saint Augustine was dying, the barbarians who had already sacked Rome were almost at the gates of his own city, the city of Hippo, and he realized that the city might be destroyed. The prayer he prayed I hope you will remember because it is an illustration of all the things that I have been trying to say.

O Lord, save the city.
But if this be not thy will,
Give us the courage to endure.
And if this be not thy will,
Then take me to thy heavenly bosom.

Let us be still now in the presence of God knowing that there is nothing that we say or think that can adequately express what we feel. Let the silence speak to us of the presence and power of God, and remind us that our prayers are not a way to get God to do something that he would not otherwise do; our prayers are an expression of a relationship with God which will deepen as we grow older.

A REALISTIC APPROACH TO LIFE

One Sunday afternoon a man whom I had never seen before rang my doorbell. He was about forty years old, happily married with three children whom he adored, and more than moderately successful in a business that he enjoyed. It was hard to see what he might have on his mind and why he had come to see me.

He was brought up by a plain, religious father and mother, and he took his early religious instruction without rebellion and, at times, with some enthusiasm. He taught a class in Sunday school during his first two years in college.

Then the war came and he joined the Army. Those were hard years in more ways than one. He saw his closest friend shot to death. He saw other men, far less deserving than his friend, come through alive. He saw good men lost and scoundrels saved. This made no sense to him, and was hard to fit into the pattern of his boyhood religion.

When he got home, his mother died suddenly. She had

had a hard life from the start, and she was just getting to the point where she could enjoy some of the things that she had never been able to do. She seemed just on the brink of real life when a heart attack put an end to it all in a few hours.

This was more than the son could bear. His sense of moral justice was violently shocked. He wondered how there could be any justice at all in a world in which such things could happen, and he soon came to the conclusion that in a world where there is no justice, there is no God. That was his decision; that was the conclusion he felt forced to draw.

And yet, he was not satisfied with it, by any means. He wanted to believe in God, but could not. He wanted God not only for himself but for his children, yet the injustice and unfairness of life stood between him and God like a wall, too strong to knock down, too high to climb. That is what he had come to talk about. He had been to the morning service and something said or done in it moved him to talk about things he had never before spoken of to anyone.

That man may be you. You have been moving along through life rather serenely on the innocent assumption that life comes out all right in the end, if you behave yourself and mind your Ps and Qs. But suddenly you have been knocked down by something that is seemingly unfair and unjust and your whole structure of religious faith, which you had always thought to be firm and solid, has crashed. You have come to the same place as the man I met on Sunday afternoon. You are not satisfied to stay in the ruins of your religious faith. You want to believe

in God and cannot. If you are that man, I am writing now especially for you and your condition.

The only realistic approach to life is to assume from the very start that life will not always come out the way you think it should. The evidence to substantiate that statement is legion. A boy of seventeen is endowed with every sort of talent, adored by his father and mother, liked and admired by his contemporaries. He goes in swimming on a summer day, dives into a pool that is too shallow, hits his head on a rock and breaks his neck. After four years of torturous life in hospitals, he dies. It is not exactly the way you and I would have life come out, but that is the way this particular life did come out.

A family in our neighborhood has five children, representing the best that any American family can possibly hope to be. Four of the children one summer had polio and the other one went to the hospital for a surgical operation. Other families, more irresponsible, less representative of the things we admire, seem to be going merrily on their way. That is not the way we would have life work out, but that is how it often does work out.

You can think of hundreds and thousands of illustrations. Some couples have children they do not want and that they do not really take care of, and other couples never have the children they long for. An honest man in politics, trying to do his best to serve the people as a civil servant, is often put on the shelf and another man who plays the political game and cuts all the corners, makes all the compromises and takes some of the graft, is promoted to high office. This is not the way we would have things come out in life, and yet they sometimes do.

This is nothing new. Jesus was killed by his contemporaries. So was Socrates, Joan of Arc, Lincoln, Gandhi; and thousands of others, nameless ones, have been plowed under by the cruel circumstances of life.

So as we sit in church calmly, not in a state of crisis, the only reasonable assumption we can make about life is that we have no reason to think that it will always be easy or pleasant. Life is hard; birth is hard and death is hard; the adjustments of adolescence are hard; the disappointments of youth are hard; the decisions of middle age and the prime of life are often difficult; the disabilities and infirmities of old age are hard; the trials and testings, the tribulations of life, are hard.

I would not want you to think that I exaggerate the darker side of life to the exclusion of the brighter side, for I do not. Life is wonderful and good and filled with all sorts of glorious things, surprises and joys that exceed our expectations. But, in spite of all these, life is hard. And it looks as though it were meant to be. American movies may promise a happy ending to every story, but life makes no such promise. The American way of life may promise security from the cradle to the grave, but life does not make that promise. Life is a struggle — blood, sweat, and tears — from the beginning to the end. A man may win and not get the prize, and the story may be told and not come out the way we want it to.

Now there are people like my visitor who will not accept this situation and they proceed to build a religious faith on the flimsy foundation of an unrealistic world in which they presume to think that everything is going to come out the way they want it, that all the geese will

turn out to be swans, and every poor girl will become a Cinderella. And when it doesn't happen that way, their faith crashes.

What I am suggesting now is that if you have not already done it, you now take with me one long step forward, out of childhood into maturity, and say that the only realistic approach to life is to admit at the start that it is not always fair according to your standards, and that it is not always going to come out the way you want it. Assume at the outset that things will happen to you that you will not like. Take your stand with Jesus. 'It must needs be,' said Jesus, 'that offenses come.' 'In the world, *tribulation.*'

Having faced and accepted that fact, you have two choices. If this is the sort of world you have to live in and if this is the kind of life you have to deal with, you then have two, and I should say only two, choices. You can say that life is a mess that does not make sense and, on the basis of the facts that I have just set down, we can see how a person might very well take that choice. Or, on the other hand, you can say that life is a divine mystery that *does* make sense — do not ask me how, do not ask me to explain all the details or answer all the questions about the whys and wherefores of it at the moment. You have two choices: one, that life is a mess that does not make sense, and the other, that life is a divine mystery that does make sense.

If you choose the first — and say that because life is often hard and unfair, therefore it is a mess that does not make sense — you have relieved some of the pressure.

There is no doubt about that. You get rid immediately of the injustices that nag your moral conscience, because there is no justice in a world that does not make sense, and therefore no injustice. There are no standards to be flouted, there are no values to be ignored, and consequently you eliminate this nagging, irritating problem of how these things can be. You have eliminated the injustice and the unfairness and all the unhappy endings. Life, according to your chosen conclusion, is a jungle; it is a struggle for survival from the beginning to the end; there are no values, no loyalties, and above all, there is no aftermath. So let every man go at it as he will, and make of it what he can!

On this assumption, you do not have the injustices to worry about, to be sure, nor do you have — and this I think sometimes you do not realize — an explanation of all the justice and the wonderful fairness that does exist in the world. You have eliminated the questions that sometimes haunt you, to be sure, but you have also eliminated that which accounts for the wonder and goodness which, in spite of the unhappy endings that do take place in life, nevertheless often transfigure life with a glory that is beyond our understanding. In other words, if you leave out the sun, you get rid of all sorts of disturbing questions about darkness and clouds, but unfortunately, you also lose the one possible explanation of the brightness that from time to time makes the world incredibly beautiful.

Also, if you take the first choice, you have for company all the cynics and skeptics, the doubters and the men of

little faith, and those who have never dared to launch out into the deep. If you like that company, it is your privilege to choose it.

On the other hand, if you take the second choice, that life is a divine mystery that does make sense, you keep all the injustices and the unhappy endings, you keep all the questions that go through your mind when things happen that affront your sense of fairness and your understanding of what is good and true, you keep all that. In fact, you intensify all that — the incongruities of life, the pieces that don't fit, the unhappy endings, the searchings and questions that rack your brain and never seem to be answered. You keep all that. But you have a God, who for one thing can give you the power to stand up and face the injustice and unfairness of life. You have a God to whom you can turn when your mind and conscience have been assaulted by something that you know is not right, and a God from whom you can expect the power and incentive to go out and cure the disease, or clean up the slums, or educate the ignorant, or free the enslaved, or make the unhappy person happy.

You also have a God who can do something himself about the injustice and the unhappy endings. Perhaps when you were a child and your parents made decisions which seemed to you entirely unjust, you didn't hesitate to express your indignation about their decision. As you look back upon it, you see that their thoughts were higher than your thoughts and that they lead you up out of what seemed to be injustice. As you grew older you learned to trust them so that you judged their decisions in the

light of what you knew about them and not them in the light of the decisions they made. Do you see that?

If you take the second alternative and say that life is a divine mystery that does make sense, you have a God whose thoughts are not your thoughts. You may think it is unfair for a woman to die too soon, just when she had reached the point where she could enjoy life, but God may not think so. God may conceivably have in store for that woman better things that you have ever dreamed of. You may think it is unfair for a man, or a young boy, or anyone else, to suffer and have a hard time in life. But God may not think so. He may see things beyond, just as your parents saw things beyond you when you were little, and God may have a plan in mind for the possible growth and development of that character and soul which far exceeds anything that you could ever think of.

You may think that the death of Jesus, especially if you put yourself back in his time and place, was an unmitigated tragedy, and the life of Pontius Pilate, going right on to the end, was a mockery of all that is fair and good. But God didn't think so, because God had other things in mind for his son and he knew all the time that in Christ's suffering he could reveal something of himself that he could reveal in no other way. And the event, which seemed to be one of such sadness and injustice, becomes in the light of the reality of God the redeeming moment in the life of mankind.

Now this is your choice. You have no choice about the world; you have no choice about whether things are al-

ways going to come out all right or not, because they will not. But this option you do have. You can make the choice about how you are going to approach life, either from the unrealistic point of assuming that life must come out all right or else there isn't a good God, or from the realistic approach that life is a mystery that is beyond you but that it makes sense because there is a God whose ways are higher than your ways.

The most beloved of all the stories that Hans Christian Andersen ever wrote was the short story of 'The Little Match Girl.' It is New Year's Eve. It is cold. The little girl has come to the end of the day with her apron full of matches which she has not been able to sell. She doesn't dare go home because her father will beat her, so she huddles down in a corner between two houses. At the end of the story, the morning following, New Year's Day, the people find the little match girl dead. An English person very recently translated the story and changed the ending, without giving any indication that the change was his and not Andersen's. The little match girl does not die of the cold, according to his version, but finds warmth and cheer and a lovely home, and lives happily ever after.

Andersen's ending is different. To keep herself warm, the little girl lights one match after another and in the glow of them she sees first a stove shining and bright, then she sees the New Year's dinner, with the goose walking straight toward her. Then, as another match is lit, she sees the Christmas tree with all the candles burning so brightly that they finally become stars. She lights another match and there stands Grannie. Grannie gets taller

and taller as she lights one match after another to keep the image and to keep herself warm. This is the ending, in Andersen's words. Grannie 'took the little girl into her arms. Together they flew in joy and splendor, up, up to where there was no cold, no hunger, no fear. They were with God. But in the cold early morning, huddled between the two houses, sat the little girl with rosy cheeks and a smile on her lips, frozen to death on the last night of the old year. The New Year dawned on the little dead body leaning there with the matches, one lot of them nearly all used up. 'She was trying to keep warm,' people said. Nobody knew what lovely things she had seen and in what glory she had gone with her old Grannie to the happiness of the New Year.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

MEN, ACCIDENTS, AND GOD

Last spring I met a man on a train who looked a little the worse for wear, and I soon found out why. He had lost his wife, his wife's mother, and his twin sons in a plane crash in Alaska. He was bitter. He blamed God for what had happened, and he was trying to get back at him by going on a world-wide spree. He had plenty of money. The only thing he did not have was the one thing he wanted, his wife and children. These had been taken away.

About all I could do was listen. He was too bruised to take much in. He wanted to talk to anyone who would listen, but especially to me because I was a minister. I represented the church and God, and he could pour out on me some, at least, of his bitterness.

I couldn't get him out of my mind after I left him. What a blow to strike a man, and how unprepared he was for it! The blows of life seem to fall so indiscriminately; such heavy ones fall on some, and others seem to escape with hardly a scratch. I couldn't help thinking to myself how differently people take the blows that

come to them, and I wondered how I would take this particular kind of blow.

The more I thought about the man, the more clearly I could see that he was making three mistakes. They are mistakes that we are all likely to make in similar circumstances, and they are worth thinking about at a time when things are relatively quiet, in the hope that when a storm hits us we shall be able to ride it out more triumphantly.

His first mistake was the mistake of running away from the scene of the disaster. Alaska was his home, and Alaska was where it happened. He was going as far away from Alaska as he could get. We are tempted to do that when we get into difficulties. A young girl who worked and lived in Boston suddenly decided to go to New York. Why? She had been romantically disappointed in Boston and she thought she could recover more quickly in New York. Perhaps she could, but the chances are against it. A change of scene may be helpful at a time like that, but don't forget that a change of scene doesn't change you. You take your troubles with you wherever you go, and you wear your griefs, though secretly, in the South Seas as surely as you wear them here. When a blow falls, it is not only what happens *to* you that you have to deal with, but also what happens *inside* you, and, fortunately or unfortunately, your insides go right along with you wherever you are. A man who has strong temptations in the city will have them in the country, and he will neither escape them nor defeat them by changing his location. On the whole, when a blow hits us, it is better to fight it out on the spot.

The man from Alaska made another mistake and that was the mistake of thinking that life should come to terms with him. He wanted his wife and family. Life owed him no less, in his judgment. Life took it all away in a single hour, and he resented it. But life isn't like that when you really stop to think of it. A child throws a fit when he can't have what he wants, but he learns better as he grows up. He learns that there are some things he can't have. They may be things he has every right to expect, but they are withheld from him. He has to learn that in the big things life doesn't come to terms with him; he has to make terms with life.

A good many people in New England grumbled all last summer about the weather. I'm afraid I was one of them. The summer is supposed to be warm and sunny. Last year it was wet and cold. We couldn't do the things we expect to do in the summer, but it didn't do us any good to grumble about it, the weather being one of the things that we cannot bring to our terms; we have to make terms with it. Life and death are like that. So are many of the events that make or break a man's life. The secondary things we can often bring to our own terms, but when we get to the big things, we come to terms with them. We don't quarrel with them; we bow before them.

The man's big mistake was in blaming everything on God. He assumed from the very beginning that God had done this terrible thing. God had taken away his wife and children. He made that assumption because he had been brought up to believe that God is responsible for everything that happens, and if he is responsible for

everything, he is *directly* responsible for *this*. That sounds like good reasoning and yet, I think, it is wrong. I am sure in my own mind that there is a difference between being *directly* and *indirectly* responsible for something.

Take the case of the headmaster of a school. In one sense, he is responsible for everything in the school. He is responsible for its policies, its morale, its standards, its discipline, and the safety of the boys. Now suppose that despite certain fire rules and regulations for the dormitories one of the boys, in the exercise of his own freedom, chooses to break the rule and, as a consequence, the dormitory catches fire and one of the boys is burned to death. Would any right-minded person hold the headmaster directly responsible for it? Indeed, he might be held indirectly responsible, for he might not have allowed the boys any freedom at all, and in that case the disaster would not have occurred. But no one, surely, would hold him directly responsible.

God is something like that. He is responsible for the world and everything in it. He made it to start with and, ultimately, it must be given back to him. But in the meantime he has given all his creatures, not only men and women, but stars and plants as well, a certain degree of freedom, freedom to do things that he would not do and that, temporarily, at least, thwart his purpose. One of his creatures once used that freedom to put a bullet through Abraham Lincoln. Would anyone say that God was directly responsible for that? Indirectly, yes, because he arranged things in the physical universe so that gun powder under friction would explode. But not directly.

John Wilkes Booth was the one directly responsible for it.

A great many of the disasters that cripple men and women are examples of the same thing. They are the direct result of freedom being misused. God is not to be blamed for the bombs that ravaged Europe in the last war. Men and women are to blame.

And, personally, I don't see how you can get around the fact that there is a place for accidents in life. Leslie Weatherhead has a good definition for the word accident. He calls it 'an incident which God did not intend, and man could not foresee.' In other words, there are some things that happen to us that, as far as we can see, no one is to blame for. The plane crash is one of those things. God made the laws of gravity. Man made the machine that could ride upon the wings of the wind. In doing so, he took risks of imperfect machinery and unforeseeable conditions of the wind and weather, and the fallible judgments of human pilots. When the machine fails and lives are lost, God may be held indirectly responsible, but surely not directly. No one is to blame. The wise man will not blame God for the accident; he will turn to him for help.

Turn back for a moment to the headmaster. Because he was responsible for the school, while he was not to blame for the fire, he was the one to be expected to rebuild what had been destroyed, to interpret the incident to the boys, to deal firmly yet gently with the boy who caused the fire, to heal the wounds of the parents whose son was lost, and finally to build a better, safer dormi-

tory than the one that burned. In such a role, the headmaster is indeed the master of the situation.

Again, God is something like that. He is not to blame for everything that happens to us. He is the one to turn to for help to take the things that has happened and make it into something good. God does not always prevent life from being broken to bits, but he can take the broken pieces and fit them together in a new picture, perhaps more beautiful than the old one. This does not diminish either the power or the majesty of God. It makes him indeed the Master of the situation.

The very same day I met the man from Alaska I met a Roman Catholic priest from St. Louis. A few months before he had been told that he had cancer of the lungs. At first the news was whispered among his intimate friends. But it wasn't very long before he began to discuss it freely with everyone, and in a few weeks people who had cancer began to write to him. Here at last was someone in their own condition with whom they could talk freely, without fear, and from whom they could learn how to meet the blow that had fallen on them. He told me that he sometimes wrote as many as two hundred letters a day just on this subject. It was easy to see why people turned to him. He had no bitterness whatever, and he had a real faith in the power and goodness of God. 'People are so kind,' he said, 'and I am so lucky; life is beautiful, and God is good.' This was not a thing to blame God or anybody else for. It was one of those things that within the interrelated freedoms of the universe is likely to happen. At present we

do not know why. There may come a time when we will. But we know now that there is a God who can help us turn even disasters into opportunities for service.

I seldom give advice to people unless they ask for it, but perhaps it is not out of order now. When the blow falls on you, don't run away from it. You may need to get away for a bit of refreshment, but sooner or later, you will have to fight it out on the spot. And don't think that life must always come to terms with you, measure up to your expectations of it. Life is far too great for that. You might as well start now to come to terms with the storms of life as well as with the splendors of the rising and setting sun. And above all, don't blame God for it. More than likely, he is not directly responsible for it. It may be simply an accident, one of these things which as long as human beings are human, fallible, frail, and capable of folly, is likely to happen. The thing to do is to try to make something of it, and God will help you, no matter what it is. Remember the line from Paul's letter to the Romans, 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,' or more accurately translated, 'We know that in all things God works together with them that love him — for good.'

A HEALTHY SENSE OF GUILT

There are two kinds of people who are almost impossible to deal with. The first are the people who are completely blind to their own shortcomings. They see, often with amazing clarity, the faults of others but they go merrily on their way sublimely ignorant of their own. Then there are the people who are obsessed with their own imperfections. They think about them all the time. They magnify them, they dwell on them, and above all, they worry about them.

Both kinds of people are difficult to deal with because both are unrealistic about themselves. The person who is blind to his imperfections is likely to be overbearing and unbearable in his relationships with other people, and the person who is obsessed with his imperfections is likely to be self-centered and yet completly lacking in self-confidence.

Which kind of person you are I don't know. But I know that the prophet Isaiah was neither kind. He had what you might call a healthy sense of unworthiness. He was by no means blind to his own faults. Listen to what he said: 'Woe is me for I am undone, because I am a man

of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' And yet he was not paralyzed by his shortcomings. He was able to get on with his task.

There isn't anyone I can think of who can lead us to a deeper sense of this whole business of a healthy sense of guilt than Isaiah. First, it is worth noting that Isaiah's sense of unworthiness came not from a miscroscopic examination of himself but from a magnificent vision of God. He wasn't sitting listening to a sermon that told him how wicked he was or what a miserable sinner he had been when he came to appreciate his own unworthiness. Nor was he comparing himself with his more successful neighbors who had things he didn't have and wished he had. He wasn't lying on a psychoanalyst's couch remembering everything he had ever done or thought. He was in the temple where he had what we would call a religious experience, a vision of God. The king had died. It was the end of an era. The people were sad and disheartened. Suddenly, above all the change and decay around him, Isaiah saw the King of the Universe, in his glory and power. The King of Judah was dead, but the King of Kings was alive! 'Woe is me for I am undone,' he said, 'for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.' The contrast between the greatness and the goodness of the God he saw and himself was too great to be overlooked. He came to his sense of unworthiness as he saw himself confronted by the perfect goodness of God.

A sense of guilt which comes in that way is likely to be natural and healthy. A person who is studying the piano hears one of the great pianists play. The contrast

between the master's perfection and his own imperfection is too great to be overlooked, and no matter how well he might have thought he played before he went to the concert, he comes away saying, Woe is me for I am undone; I have heard the king!

Clergymen are sometimes tempted to spend too much time telling people about their sins and too little time telling them about the perfection that is in Christ Jesus. When you see how he never took thought of the impression that he was making on other people, then you may see what a prima donna you are. When you see how he never pretended to be anything that he wasn't, you may see for the first time what a bluff you are. When you see how he was never afraid to do anything he thought was right, you may then see what a milk-toast you are. When you see how there was no limit to his caring, you may then see how small is the circle of your love. You may see it. Some, of course, do not. They behold the beauty of perfection and yet are blind to the ugliness of their own shortcomings. But if you don't see your faults in that way, the chances are you never will see them.

Besides this, notice that Isaiah's sense of unworthiness included not only his own imperfection but also the imperfections of his people. 'I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' As a matter of fact, there isn't any reason to suppose that Isaiah himself had a lurid past. There is every indication that he lived a fairly normal life of growth and development and his sins were the normal sins that besiege the human race. But his world had gone wrong. There was corruption in high places and irresponsibility was rampant.

While Isaiah himself did not participate directly in any of these things, he came to the awareness that in some strange sense, he shared the wrongness of his world and was, at least in part, responsible for it. It is the way a man feels whose brother has done something disgraceful. Because he belongs to the same family, the innocent brother shares the disgrace and in a sense feels partly responsible for it.

There are two kinds of people to look out for. One is the person who talks a lot about his own shortcomings but feels no responsibility for the confusion and strife in the world. The other is the person who says that the world is full of cruelty and war and corruption, but his life is an open book. Or the American who says that Russia is the devil in disguise, France is morally rotten, Germany can never be trusted, Italy is spineless, India is on the fence, Great Britain's day is done, but our record is clean! Our record is better than some, but our responsibility is therefore greater. And if the world is in a state of complete disorganization and confusion, we share in that state and are at least partly responsible for it because of the things that we might have done and have not done, and the things that we should not have done and have done.

I hope you see by now that the more a man's sense of guilt is concerned with something besides his own personal mistakes, the more healthy it is, and that the more clearly a man sees the King, the more clearly will he see the faults of himself and his world. One of the reasons why Isaiah's sense of unworthiness was healthy is that it reached out to the ends of the earth, and it took the whole

thing into its vision and lifted it up to be contrasted with the moral grandeur of God. As soon as you get out of the little shallow pool of your own mistakes into these greater issues, the more healthy your own sense of unworthiness will be.

That is still not the end of the story, quite. The story goes on to say (and this, I think, is hard for most people, at least modern readers, to read and understand) one of the angelic attendants in the court of the Almighty went to the altar and took a live, burning coal from off the altar and took it to the prophet and placed it upon his lips, and as he did so the prophet heard him say, 'Lo, this has touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.' The mystery of forgiveness is too deep, far too deep, for us to attempt to probe at this time. We all know of the power of forgiveness. We have seen families brought together after the failure of one or more members, the breaches healed, the feuds stopped, and somehow the tensions relieved by some magnificent act of forgiveness. We might say here, rather parenthetically, that purification is almost always by fire. That kind of forgiveness and reconciliation is not likely to come about unless somebody suffers. And the sad thing about it is — and this again is not directly relevant to this subject — we are likely to be purified by the burning of somebody else. It was the burning of a girl nineteen years old that purified some of the hardened ecclesiastics of France and England, Joan of Arc. And it was the crucifixion of the young Prince of Glory in his early thirties that in some mysterious way has cleansed men and women ever since.

This we know, and this is from a pragmatic point of view, the only one we can take at the moment. We know that Isaiah's sense of unworthiness did not cripple him but rather sent him out to do a tremendous job. He did not sit down and say, 'Woe is me, for I am undone, and therefore because I am a miserable sinner I am not fit to do anything in the world.' What he heard God say was this: 'Whom shall I send?' He said, 'Here am I, send me.' And God sent him.

Now why is it that Isaiah's sense of guilt did not cripple him the way yours sometimes cripples you? I think there is just a hint here of the answer. The reason it did not cripple him is that it came from above. If we may go back to a very imperfect analogy, to the pianist, the person who is trying to play the piano is often tempted to listen to his contemporary classmates play. He hears one play better than he does, and he judges himself by that. That judgment is likely to produce nothing more or less than a sense of inferiority because there is jealousy in it — envy from his side, and pride and superiority on the side of the other person. But when he submits himself to the judgment of a supreme master of whom he is not jealous, his sense of unworthiness is greater than before, but with it goes an incredible power to go ahead in spite of his unworthiness. There comes from above both the judgment and the incitement to go ahead.

So we may offer this as an answer to the question of why some people's sense of unworthiness is more healthy than others: the greater the object by which you judge yourself, the more unworthy you will feel, and the more power you will have to go on in spite of your unworthiness.

Supreme objects of adoration not only put us to shame; they also draw us with infinite patience toward themselves.

By way of conclusions, if you never say to yourself, 'I am not worth the powder it would take to blow me up,' there is something wrong with you. You have never seen the King. If you say it all the time, there is something more radically wrong with you. And what is wrong, probably, is that you are judging yourself by standards too low, by your fellowmen, whom you are trying to ape or emulate and who leave you enervated with the sense of your own inferiority.

Look up! Look at him who is above us all. Look at the Lord Jesus, whose character is flawless, and without blemish. You will say, to be sure, as Peter said, 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man.' But you may hear him say to you, 'Go out into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and give my life to as many people as you can; do something in the world for me.' And you will realize that you have a power to go on in spite of your unworthiness.

THE ELEVATION OF A LIFE

One of the interesting and significant facts about a place is its elevation, its altitude. If, for example, you should look up the city of Boston in one of the good almanacs, you would find a list of facts something like these: when it was incorporated, 1822; population, slightly under a million; location, on the Massachusetts Bay; area, in square miles, about forty-six; the number of telephones, radios, and TV sets, interestingly enough, in the city; tax rate, debt, revenue, and expenditures; *and* altitude, 330 feet at the highest, and sea level at the lowest.

Places vary widely in their elevation. The city of Denver, as you know, is over a mile high. Miami has an average altitude of ten feet. Omaha is somewhere in between, at an altitude of 1,270 feet; and Houston is at sea level. Some places even vary within themselves, and I was surprised to find that Los Angeles, which as you know covers a great deal of ground, at some points is 5,081 feet above sea level, and at others is at the level of the sea itself.

The fact of elevation would not be noted if it were not important. In other words, the altitude of a place deter-

mines, to some degree at least, its climate; its climate determines, to some degree, the temperament of the people; and their temperament plays a large part in how they behave. The altitude of a place has something to do with the business, the industry, of a place, and it determines, partly at least, whether it be fishing or farming, shipping or the tourist trade. As far as places go, therefore, elevation is what we would call a vital statistic.

What about people? If you should look up a man or a woman in *Who's Who,* you would find something like this: date and place of his birth, the names of his parents, where he went to school and college, his wife and children if he has any, his occupation and achievements, and honors. What about the elevation of his life? It isn't given because it isn't possible to measure accurately with an altimeter the elevation at which a man or woman lives. It's like trying to measure the quality of a man's life. But that isn't to say that it does not exist or that it is not important.

This thought intrigues me, the elevation of a man's life. Suppose we could measure it, it would certainly vary the way the elevations of places vary. Some people live below sea level. We might say that they live in the lowlands of life; they grope and seldom soar; they live continually in the depressed areas of life, and under an exceedingly low ceiling. Many people do better than that; they live *at* sea level. They have emerged from the bogs of life and they move in the sunlight, with some small degree of freedom and joy, but they never move very high above the level of the sea. They comb the beaches and are content with the treasures that have been washed

in by the tide. And some, of course, reach great heights and live most of the time in the uplands. They are the exhilarating spirits.

Whether they live below, at, or above sea level does not depend entirely on whether or not they are preoccupied with the things of the flesh. That is what we normally associate with the phrase 'the low life.' This certainly is one factor that must enter into any attempt to measure the elevation of a man's life, but it is not the primary thing. What determines whether a person lives below sea level or above it is something quite different. It has to do with whether life is on top of him, or he is on top of it. It has to do with the freedom with which he moves about and handles the things that he has to deal with in life. It has to do with whether or not when he comes into a room full of confusion he clears the air, or whether he contributes to the confusion. It has to do with some inner quality that radiates from him wherever he is, something that people feel instantly when they come into his presence so that they say, There is a person whose elevation is above the average. People like that invariably communicate life to other people wherever they are.

I was talking recently with a retired Harvard professor, who once taught me years ago, and who listened to Phillips Brooks through the years of his college education. Among the things that he said about him was this: 'As I look back upon it, the thing that stands out preeminently is the elevation which he sustained in his sermons, and toward which he constantly drew us.' That is why scores of students trooped into Trinity Church

every Sunday to hear him. It was the heights he moved on that lured them. There are still people like that, not necessarily preachers or even church people, people whose lives you can tell in an instant are pitched at a higher level than those of most others.

Also, of course, if we could measure the actual elevation at which people live, we would find that it would vary in individuals as well as among individuals. This is strange. It is well known to all of you, but it is worth noting as we pass along this interesting way. A man may reach great heights in his creative life, for example, and die a drunkard. Christopher Marlowe, who had the sort of genius that makes some people willing to attribute to him all the plays of Shakespeare and who could write the line, 'Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium?' was killed in a tavern brawl.

Some people live at high levels at home and at low levels in public. I remember reading several years ago of a notorious gangster who took great pains to see that flowers were sent to his mother on Mother's Day and this because the relationship between him and his mother was a deep and sincere one. And yet his relationship with the rest of mankind was the relationship of a gangster to an unsuspecting public.

We know, I suspect, that this is true of our own lives. We have our high spots and our low spots. Sometimes we reach heights that surprise even ourselves and then sometimes, very shortly after, we drop to depths that shock us when we stop to think about them. This brings us to an important question that I shall now put to you

as directly as I can. What is the elevation of your life? Suppose you could take a reading of it. What about your thoughts? Are they little, twisted thoughts, corrupted by prejudices, or are they great thoughts, objective, clear, genuine? Do they prefer the ruts and gutters to the high places of life? Are they primarily concerned with your own selfish interests, or are they generous thoughts? Are they consumed with the trivialities of life, or do they reach up and lay hold on the great things of life? This is an interesting question to put to yourself once in a while: What is the average elevation of my thoughts from day to day?

What is the elevation of your home life? To be sure, it has its ups and downs — we take that for granted — but are the downs more frequent than the ups? What about the relationships with the other members of the family, your wife, or husband, the children? Are they occasionally clear and transparent but most of the time misty and foggy? What is the elevation of the family that you dwell in? Would it depress a stranger, or inspire him?

And then, this is a hard one to answer, at least for me. What is the elevation of your secret impulses, the things you would like to do if you dared? We all have them, let no one be discouraged because he has secret impulses that are not good. Every person who will read this book has them. What we look forward to, however, is that gradually those secret impulses will be lifted up to higher levels so that there won't be so many to keep constantly clamped down. When you are with people, is it your secret impulse to get the best of them, or to

draw the best out of them? Is your secret impulse to take advantage of every situation, or to make yourself useful in every situation?

What is the elevation of your prayers? Are they childish prayers, trying to get from God the things that you want, little nagging, needling requests of the Most High? Prayer like that can easily fall to low, selfish levels unless you keep lifting it up by your acts of praise and thanksgiving so that your prayers become high places in your life when you have great visions and set your eyes on distant goals and take in by your compassion and understanding more people than you normally do.

Of course, your actions come into this. What is the elevation of your ordinary day-to-day behavior? One of the problems that I find difficult is that my behavior is fairly good to the people I know, and sometimes not so good to the people that I don't know. I am often surprised, as I know you are, when I call someone on the telephone and the voice that answers on the other end might be the voice of a demon, and then suddenly when recognition dawns, it becomes with almost unbelievable speed the voice of an angel. This is a clue, you see, to the fact that people live at different altitudes: at one when they are dealing with their friends and people they know, and at quite another when they are dealing with people they do not know. What we would like to do, of course, is to live at a higher altitude more of the time, more consistently. We are not so unrealistic as to expect to live on the heights always — we know that that is not likely to be possible. What we would like to do is to raise gradually the lower levels so that the high spots

might come more often than they would otherwise, and the low spots might not be either so low or so frequent.

You may have a question to ask me at this point, and perhaps the question is this: Whatever started you thinking about the elevation of people's lives? And you might not guess my answer. The answer is not that I have met someone either on the heights or in the depths. I have been thinking of Ascension Day, the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven.

The Ascension adds one vital statistic to the story of Jesus. It might read this way in *Who's Who:* born in Bethlehem; parents, Mary and Joseph; raised in Nazareth; unmarried; carpenter by trade; no formal education; short public ministry; tried and convicted of treason; put to death on a cross; *elevation, heaven!* There was a certain quality about the life of Jesus that lifted it to the highest level that we in our poor minds have any conception of. This is not the time or the place to try to describe that quality at any great length. In these few words let me indicate what it is. He had a God-like willingness to love even godless men and women. His thoughts were lifted above the level of the commonplace. His actions were on a level high enough to match his thoughts. And even his death was not a descent into the depths but an ascension to the heights. Wherever he went he communicated life; he made vulgar men want to be noble, and small men want to be great. When he left the earth, what happened to him? Did he go into the ground? No, men said, he went into the heavens. He went to the very skies. He went to the top of all things.

For here was one among the sons of men the elevation of whose life was no lower than the sky itself.

It is important, I think, that you note well the fact that heaven in this sense was not in the clouds, by any manner of means. It was in the wilderness, when Jesus was there. It was in his home and the relationship that he had with Mary and Joseph, and his brothers and sisters. It was in the marketplace where he worked and promised his customers a good yoke for their oxen, and fulfilled this promise. It was along the highway when he talked to men who were in trouble and tried to relieve them of their ailments. It was by the lakeside where he had the opportunity to teach men and to bring the very life of heaven down into the narrow ways of their own restricted lives. It was even on a cross, on which he could die in such a way as to bring men and women into the very presence of God.

In other words, you see, heaven is not some mythological place. Heaven is a quality of life that one catches by living in the presence of God always. And this we might also put down in our minds as we pass, altitude and lowliness often go together in life.

Perhaps you now see why I began to think about the elevation of our lives. You can never for any length of time lift your own life from the level on which it now exists. At least, I do not believe so. I have seen people bravely try to do it, aware of the fact that one whole side of their life is dragging bottom, so to speak. They have tried by will power to lift it up, and for moments perhaps they have succeeded, but by and large, their life

drags continually. It is always the same story. You can only be drawn up into something higher by something greater than yourself.

Friends of mine had a boy, the youngest boy, who didn't seem to develop the way the others did, or the way they hoped he would. He had all the native ability he needed, but it was running toward the lower levels of life. His friends were not the kind of people who would help to bring out the best in him. His talk was rough; his thoughts were not what they ought to be; his manners were crude; his habits were not good. They tried to do everything they could to encourage him to lift the level of his own life, but the boy could not do it. He made no response whatever to their efforts. Then they sent him to a good school, one of our church schools, incidentally. He was then exposed to an entirely different atmosphere and the headmaster was one of those men who understood a boy like him. Before Christmas of the first term you could see the elevation of that life begin wonderfully to rise, and now after two years you would hardly know that he was the same boy.

Christianity is greater than that, but I think not essentially different from that. When a man exposes himself to the influence of Jesus, I mean really exposes himself seriously, his thoughts and behavior, manners, secret impulses, and prayers, the elevation of his life then begins to rise because in Jesus the heavens, which we are all longing to attain in some figurative sense, came down among men so that men could be raised up into them.

Think about this as the days go by. It would be very easy for a preacher to moralize about it, and I promise you

that I shall not. But I have a feeling, perhaps it is only one of those impressions that are current in every generation, that the elevation of life in our day is not as high as it might be, or that it could be. I also think that the altitude of the lives of Christians is not as high as the world has a right to expect it to be. And I would like to think that everyone who exposes himself to the influence of Jesus in the church would gradually see his life begin to rise so that his thoughts would be bigger thoughts, and more generous thoughts, his secret impulses cleaner and more creative, his prayers more magnanimous, and his behavior so outgoing and unself-centered that he would reflect something of the very Christ who had lifted him up.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER

There was a review of a moving picture in *Time* that caught my attention. The name of the picture is *The Bold and The Brave*. I have not seen it; I have only read the review. It is the story of a young American sergeant fighting in Germany during the last war. The story, as I gathered from the review, is not about the Battle of the Bulge, but rather about the battle going on in the sergeant's soul. His father had died of drink when the soldier was a small boy, and his guardian, who happened to be a religious fanatic, told him in no uncertain terms that his father had gone to the devil, and that he would likewise go to the devil. The young man had been bottled up with fears all his life and, according to the reviewer, he had equated the life of the flesh with the death of the soul.

In Germany two of his buddies attempt to enlarge his horizons, and set out to play what they choose to think is a practical joke on him, although it turns out to be anything but a joke. They arrange a meeting with him and an Italian girl, who is as unlike him in upbringing and background as anybody could be. She had been

brought up in the ways of easy virtue and, at the moment, love was her profession. When she meets the American boy, she realizes at once that he is not her kind. She takes him on a picnic, and what happens is briefly described by the reviewer in these lines: 'And suddenly, with a luminous sweetness rarely seen on the screen, they are in love, and love transforms them. His sore soul heals like a wound in sunlight, and her shut face opens like a merry parasol.'

Here are two people locked up in life, one by lust and one by fear. There are a lot of people like that in the world today. You see them, and I see them, all the time, people who are virtually locked up inside themselves, living on only a portion of their resources and rising to only a fraction of their potentialities. Their souls are sore, and their faces are shut.

There are always two pedals, you know, on every piano. Some pianos have three, but there are at least two, and you often hear people refer to them as the "soft' and the 'loud' pedal. There is no such thing, of course, as a 'loud' pedal, but the pedal that people call the 'loud' pedal is the one that lifts the dampers from the strings. The 'damper,' according to the dictionary, is 'a device to deaden the vibration of the strings.' And, in a piano, of course, you must have that device because if the strings vibrated all the time, all together, there would be a chaos of sound. But when a person puts his foot on the 'loud' pedal, he lifts the dampers, and lets the strings sing.

Is it not true that there are a great many people among us, including even ourselves in some periods in our lives, who are like the strings that have never had the dampers

lifted, and therefore do not vibrate at their full, resonant capacity? They are locked up inside themselves, like the two people in the picture. And when I read of those two people who were suddenly transformed, let loose, as it were, I thought to myself, they may have something to say to us.

The first thing they have to say is this. They did for each other what neither one could have done for himself alone. There are some things that you can do for yourself, and some things you cannot. For instance, you can get yourself out of debt if you work, and scrape, and save, and hoard, and stint yourself. But you can't always get yourself out of the doldrums. To be sure, you can bestir yourself and put yourself in a position where something may shake you into life, but you are not going to get out of the doldrums, if they are the real doldrums, until something or, more likely, someone from outside breaks into your life like streaks of light and, without any effort on your part, will lift you right up out of those lethargic quagmires. That is the kind of thing that two people can do for each other when one alone cannot do it for himself.

You can make a living, if you work hard enough, use your wits, and keep at it. But you can't by yourself alone make life *worth* living. You can make every effort in that direction but, unless people and things and interests come into your life, your life won't be worth living no matter how much of the wherewithal you have to live on. Again, you can get yourself in trouble, sometimes gloriously in trouble, but you can't always get yourself out of it. You can put yourself in a position to be drawn out of it, but

you by yourself alone cannot always get yourself out of the trouble that you have so easily gotten into.

The older generation may recall a painting by Holman Hunt — a popular painter at the turn of the century — called 'The Light of the World.' The picture shows Jesus standing at the door of a cottage knocking, and under the painting is the inscription, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock.' I remember being told when I was a small boy to look for the handle on the door and, of course, there is none. Then the person who was teaching me went on to say, 'You see, the door of the self has no handle on the outside; Jesus cannot force his way in, or even let himself in; you have to open it from the inside, yourself.' And that is true. But there is another side to it. There are times in your life when there is nothing you can do on the inside to open the door and, unless somebody comes from the outside, and of his own free and generous will opens the door and strides in, you are lost, because you cannot open the door from the inside.

There are two things, therefore, to remember before we go any further with this little parable. The first is the obvious one, to keep the doors and windows of your life open wide. If you now happen to be in anything like the predicament I have described, that is, if you feel that your life is not vibrating the way it should, that the dampers are on, the thing for you to ask yourself right away is this: Am I keeping all the doors and windows open, or am I retiring, withdrawing, shutting all the blinds, closing all the doors, too reticent to let anybody see what is going on within, too proud to let any-

body come in to help me? If you want life, and all that life means, if you want to 'take away the mute and play on the open strings,' then keep the doors and windows open, and keep yourself exposed to whatever may be there waiting to come in.

The other thing to remember is this. You may be the person who can unlock the door of another life. I am not going to pause to develop this possibility because I have done it so many times before. But just let that register in your mind at the moment, and perhaps seep down lower into your subconscious, and as you move about among people, look at them and see if their faces are shut; see if their soul is sore; and ask yourself if you may not be the one who by some word, or some token of interest, can unlock the door of that person's life and let him out. There is no greater satisfaction in the world.

Now we shall move on to the next point, which is the more important, and that is, the power that unlocked their lives was love. In their case, it was romantic love, and one doesn't usually use an example of romantic love as an illustration in a sermon. Did you ever stop to think of that? In fact, I thought for quite a while before I decided that this was an appropriate illustration to use in a sermon. I came to the conclusion that the reason people do not speak often, or very favorably, of romantic love in sermons, or even when they are talking about serious things in general, is that they have secret suspicions about it. They think, somewhere in the corner of their mind, that there is something sinful about it, or if not sinful, then definitely second-class. Granted that it is a far cry from the Divine Love, yet I am perfectly sure that it is

akin to it, that it is a slight intimation of greater things to come, that it is related to that liberating power at the center of the universe that we call the Love of God. It is a faint glimmer of the Brighter Light.

To go back to this particular couple, and to the romantic love which unlocked the doors of their lives, I realize, of course, that it is almost impossible to speak about this kind of love, or to describe it. It does such different things to different people. It makes one person dizzy, it makes another person sick, it makes one person incredibly serious and another person appear to be stupid, at least for a while. One thing it always does — when it is real, and more than a passing fancy — it changes the couple's outlook on the whole world. It floods their world with a glory which it may never have had before.

Another thing we can be sure of, at its best, love always makes a person more alive, and for two very good reasons. First, it gives the person something to live on. We need more than bread and butter to live on, you know that perfectly well. We need somebody's care and affection and love to live on. We need to know that we are the supreme object in somebody's mind, in order to be and to do our best. Furthermore, it gives him someone to live for. None of us can ever be his best self until he has some object for which he is not only willing to live, but glad to live, glad to die, if need be, and to whom he is ready to give everything that he has on earth, and all that he may hope to have in heaven. A person without a Vision hasn't any life. A person without an idol in his life is a poor, starved person. So, it is no wonder that a

person who falls in love romantically is more alive than he was before because he has something to live on; somebody cares about every move he makes, and every thought he thinks. He has a vision to live for, someone to work for, to strive for.

In the case of the two young people in the movie, their love didn't last. I hate to tell you that! But it shouldn't surprise you; it really shouldn't surprise you for several reasons. Think of this: Do the great moments of liberation and illumination ever last? I do not believe they do. They may grow into something else, but the fires of life are like the fires on a hearth. They don't burn automatically forever; they have to be lit over and over again and, the fire, as it dies out into its smoldering embers, must be rekindled. Of course, in this particular case, the circumstances were against the couple from the beginning; their pasts opposed them from the very start and, when the boy found out about the girl, his love died.

Also it is true, and I think we ought to recognize it here, that romantic love never lasts unless it grows into something greater. Some of you may take exception to that, but in my experience in observing people, and I have seen a good many people in the course of the years, it is true. In saying this I am not taking back or minimizing what I have already said about romantic love, but what I am saying is that romantic love, in and by itself, is like one of those thrilling skyrockets that send chills up and down your spine on the Fourth of July when it is shot up into the sky to burst into a shower of stars. As the stars fall, they fade, and finally go out.

On the other hand, romantic love at its best grows like

everything else in life into something greater, deeper, more profound, more enduring, of which it is only the shadow and the symbol. And the greater Love is only a step beyond it. I am going to give you an illustration of it, not from the life of a contemporary, but from the life of someone you all know and respect. A new biography of Robert E. Lee has just been published in the series *Great Lives in Brief*. As you read that incredible story once again, the thing, of course, that you keep asking yourself is this: How did the Confederate Army survive, nay, succeed, for three and a half years, when it was outnumbered, unclothed, unfed, and so poorly equipped? There are two or three answers. One is that the North did not have the best leadership in the world; another is that Lee was one of the great military geniuses of all time. But these are not the real answers. The real answer is that in Lee there was to an amazing degree the transforming power of love.

Writes the biographer, 'He would get down from Traveler on a cold November day and say to a flushed-face lieutenant, "My boy, let me show you how to make a fire." ' Then he would take the sticks and rearrange them and say, ' "This is the way the old servants taught me how to do it when I was a boy." ' He lived on the same rations that the soldiers lived on; he slept on the same kind of cot, with the same blanket, that they slept on. Is it any wonder that the men adored him? Is it any wonder that one of them, an unknown person, at the end of a long address on atheism, ended by saying, 'Well boys, the rest of us may have developed from monkeys; but I tell you none less than a God could have made such

a man as Marse Robert.' It was the transforming power of a love that came down from above, and lifted up those poor bedraggled, unclothed, unfed men, and so unlocked their hidden resources that they were able to fight like giants against the superior armies of the North, with a spirit that almost won the war.

This is a step that is one step beyond romantic love, and it is inevitable that we refer to it as a transforming power. There is no other force I know of which has that power other than love. It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, when we find St. John, with great spiritual penetration and insight, saying that this power is God. 'God is Love,' and Love is God. This is the transforming power that unlocks the secret places of human life and allows the strings to vibrate without any impediment whatsoever, so that a man can fulfill his life without fear and without being dragged down to the depths. St. John knew this power was God himself.

This is what Christianity is all about. Without being irreverent, we might even paraphrase the wonderful quotation from the Lee biography and say that in our Christian belief, God, like the great general, came down among his men, and on a cold December day, stooped and said, 'My boy, let me show you how to make a fire. Let me show you how to handle the fires and passions of your own life; let me show you how to live and how to use the great things that I have given you; let me release you from the heavy burdens of guilt so that you can move without weights on your feet, and let me give you back your wings, that I meant you to have.' That is what Christianity is, the sore souls healed

and the shut faces opened. This is the transforming power of love. This is God.

God does it, of course, partly through us. This brings us back to one of the things that I said in the beginning. Leslie Weatherhead, the beloved preacher of the City Temple in London, wrote in one of his books about the intercessions of the congregation for a woman in great physical distress, 'It is not as though God could not help her without us, but he himself has ordained in a thousand situations that he desires to work with us. He would pick our caring and turn it into her courage, our love and turn it into her will to get well, our solicitude and turn it into her serenity. God uses our caring to express his own.'

Let that rest upon you as part of the burden of this message, the other side of the great good news that it brings you. Once in a while, stop and think of the two young people in love and how, even for a moment, their love transformed their lives. 'His sore soul heals like a wound in sunlight, and her shut face opens like a merry parasol.' What is this transforming power? It is the Love of God which passeth all understanding, and it is in you and me to give to some person who is locked behind the closed doors of his own life.

THE MIRACLE OF CHRIST

Jesus was enormously popular during the brief months of his ministry. We have been told so many times that he was rejected by his people that we sometimes forget about the rank and file who heard him gladly and followed him in droves wherever he went. From time to time he took a few of his close friends off into the hills just to get away from the pressure of the crowd. Even with his inexhaustible supply of vitality, he had to take time out to take something in. That in itself is worth remembering.

On one particular occasion, Jesus took the disciples to the other side of the lake, just to get a rest from the people. But the people found out where he was going and got there ahead of him. There was no rest for the weary. When he saw them, he was sorry for them; they were like 'sheep without a shepherd.' We cannot help thinking, in passing, how we would have behaved in a similar situation. We would probably have been irritated, disappointed, annoyed, and silent. Jesus was not. There were the people and they were hungry for the word of

God. Without any further ado, he began to talk to them.

As the day went on, the question of food came up, and how they could be fed in that deserted place. In John's account of the story, Jesus was the one who first brought up the subject. He said to Philip, 'Where can we buy food for these people to eat?' The answer was, 'Nowhere.' Even if they had had a lot of money, which they did not have, it would not have been enough to buy food for a crowd like that; each one would not have had much more than a bite.

Then Andrew, Peter's brother, ventured to point out that there was a boy in the crowd who had brought his lunch, five small rolls and two fish. Andrew undoubtedly meant to be helpful, but he must have realized very quickly that his suggestion only magnified the shortage. No food at all was bad enough, but one little boy's lunch to feed a crowd of several thousand made the situation seem even more impossible. He added immediately the question, 'But what are they among so many?' The answer again, of course, 'Nothing.' It was a situation in which the supplies were not only short, they were virtually non-existent.

Then Jesus said, 'Make the men sit down.' You can almost feel the quiet that came over the crowd. Hundreds of people had been buzzing about, wondering what they were going to do, discussing the situation with their neighbors, fidgeting and fussing, worrying and speculating. And then, 'Make the men sit down.' All the chatter ceases, all the fidgeting and fussing stops. You can feel the power of Jesus' personality begin to take hold of the people. In his simple command there is an imperious

note, and the people who had been stretching every nerve quietly sat down and waited to be fed.

Then Jesus took the food that the boy had brought, thanked God for it, and gave it to the disciples to distribute to the people. There was enough for everyone and some left over. When the people had all been fed and got up at last to go home, they said, 'This certainly is the Prophet who was to come into the world.'

This is the familiar story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. It is one of the relatively few stories about Jesus which is told by all four of the Evangelists, and two of them tell it twice. They told it often because the people loved it. Why did they love it so much, and what does it mean to us?

As we read the story, we want to know what really happened. We are inquisitive by nature, and analytical by training. The clear implication of the story is that the food was miraculously multiplied. We can be sure of this much: the men who told the story believed that something miraculous happened. That is why they told it!

We are not at home in the atmosphere of the miraculous. For one thing, science has given us an understanding of the universe that the people of the first century did not have. We know a great deal more about the laws by which God runs his universe than they did, and we count on the fact that God will keep the laws that he himself has made. So the thought of Jesus interrupting all the laws of germination and growth to multiply food on the spot is not congenial to us, perhaps not even agreeable to us.

And added to that is the fact that we get from the

Gospels the very definite impression that Jesus himself did not want to be thought of as a wonder-worker. He refused to make stone into bread or to jump off the tower of the temple just to show God's miraculous power.

But there are two facts that we must not forget. One is that stories like this have something behind them. They are not made up out of whole cloth. If we have any confidence at all in the integrity of the men who wrote the Gospels, we cannot think that they deliberately lied. The details of the story were undoubtedly exaggerated as the story was told and re-told, the amount of food got less and less, and the number of the people more and more. But there must have been some center of fact around which these details clustered.

The other is that unique people do unique things. Mozart wrote a concerto before he was five years old. People don't ordinarily do that. But Mozart was not an ordinary person. So it is with Jesus. He was not an ordinary person doing ordinary things. He was an altogether extraordinary person doing things that have never been seen or heard of since. Our scientifically minded age is rightly proud of its knowledge of the laws by which God operates, but it is also in great danger of locking God up in his own laws so that no room is left for the unusual and the extraordinary. It would be hard to think of a much duller universe!

Speaking now from my own personal point of view, I am prepared to say that in this case I don't know exactly what happened, and I doubt if I ever shall. I know something much more important than that: I know that Christ can make a little go a long way. Curious as I am,

and as much as I would like to know exactly what happened when the five thousand were fed, I am not half so curious to know what happened to a little boy's lunch as I am to know whether, in the face of my own shortages, when I have so little strength to do so much, and when my own supplies of faith and energy seem so utterly inadequate for the task in hand, whether there is any power in heaven or earth that can multiply the little that I have and make it adequate to meet the need. And that is exactly what this story tells me: Christ can make a little go a long way.

Think how little he had himself, and what he did with it. He had almost nothing to live on, and he increased it until it became 'the unsearchable riches of Christ.' He had less than a dozen men to work with, and not perfect ones either, and he made them into millions of saints and martyrs! He had less than a New England state to move around in, and he stretched it until it covered the whole world! He had less than three years to do his work in, and he made them into the equivalent of eternity! He had less than one man's lunch to feed five thousand people, and he made it enough to fill the need, with some to spare!

This is the miracle of Christ. He can take a little health, and make it go an incredibly long way. He can take a little time and money, if you are willing to let him have it, and multiply it into millions. He can take what little faith you have, and make it strong enough to defend you against every conceivable enemy.

Let me tell you about one specific instance in which such a thing happened. In the nineteenth century, there was a blind boy in Scotland who wanted to be a minister.

Everybody tried to discourage him. How could a blind man be a minister? How could he write his sermons, read the Bible, get around to see his people? It was fantastic. But he did it! George Matheson became one of Scotland's great preachers. Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin tells how, when he was a student in Edinburgh, he would go down into the poor district of the city to listen to Matheson preach in a great barn of a church to a huge congregation of working people. He was led into the pulpit. He read the Scripture from memory. He prayed prayers that were later written down by others and have become meat and drink for thousands. He wrote hymns that we all sing: 'O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee.'

When the time came for him to lay down his responsibilities, he said to his people, 'I came like a taper amid the torches . . . My sermons may have flown over your heads like the bird of Paradise, but my life has been level with your own — an obstructed life, a circumscribed life, but a life of boundless hope.'

That is the way Christ takes the shortages of a man's life and multiplies them to meet the need. That is why this story has been so everlastingly popular. The people with shortages of all kinds — just a little health and strength, only a little money, only a spare talent or a scrap of ability — these are the people who have heard the story and listened to it gladly. It is a promise, and the promise is this. If you take what you have and let Christ use it in his way, that is, if you will let Love have its way with what you have, it will be more than enough to meet any situation that may arise.

WHAT MAKES LIFE WORTH LIVING?

One evening last spring, quite late, a young man came to see me in my study. He was a total stranger to me. After a few remarks in which he very clearly revealed the deep distress he was in, he asked the question, 'Is life worth living?'

You may never have come to the point where you ask that question. Most people are too busy living life to take time to ask whether it is worth living or not. Normally, a person takes for granted that life is worth living, and he doesn't stop to ask questions about it. But I am also quite sure that most of you, whether you ever put the question or not, have wondered about it secretly. It may be good for us now, while the storm is not raging, to think about it.

We might very well begin, as I often begin in talking with someone who asks me that question, with another question, What *makes* life worth living? I cannot say, of course, what makes like worth living for you. I can only say what makes it worth living for me, and I say that there are, by and large, three things that make my life worth living.

The first is a certain amount of physical pleasure. Man is made not only to endure life's hardships, but to enjoy life's pleasures. He is equipped for both. God has given man five senses by which he can make contact with the physical world — sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell — and they all can give him pleasure. Think of some of the pleasures that come to us by way of our senses: the sight of a tree in its autumn coloring, of snow falling, the sound of a French horn, or of rain falling on the roof, the taste of good food, the touch of a person you love, the smell of lilacs.

Christians, I think, are sometimes likely to be embarrassed by these pleasures. They enjoy them, but they feel somehow that they should not enjoy them, and they are secretly suspicious of them. They need not suffer from any such embarrassment. There are people, of course, who so settle down in the life of the senses that they become sensualists, and we can watch them deteriorate day by day until they become less than human. But God gave us our senses to be gateways into the world he made; and while he expects us to choose what comes and goes through those gateways, he does not, I believe, expect us to close them.

If a man loses all his capacity to enjoy life in this sense, I can see how he might think life was not worth living. But in my experience, and yours may be different from mine, I have never seen such a person. I have seen people whose senses have been handicapped, blunted sometimes, even paralyzed. But I have seen other faculties sensitized to make up for the loss. I have seen people whose senses have been so impaired that you might think that none

of the glories of the world could come into them, and yet these same people could be thrilled by the sight of the light of the moon across the floor. That is one of the things, then, that makes life worth living. Not the only thing, to be sure, and by itself not enough, but nevertheless one of the important things, the enjoyment of the physical world.

The second thing is a chance to be of use. Man is made not only for life, but also for love, that is, he is made not only to take life in, but to pour it out. And he cannot be happy until he is both taking life in *and* pouring it out.

Some people are of more use to the world and to the people in it than others. Some people seem destined to occupy places of prominence, like Moses. They are the leaders of great movements, the initiators of new ideas, the creators of art. And then, there are other people, more like Moses' mother, nameless yet indispensable, who looking upon the new child saw that he was a 'proper child' and hid him in the rushes to protect him from the dangers of a government that was out to destroy him, and thus gave him a chance to grow into manhood. None of us serve the *same* purposes in the world, but each of us serves *some* purpose.

There are various ways of being useful and one of the difficulties with most of us is that we sometimes waste a great deal of energy by wanting to be Moses, when in reality we are only his mother. It is not often that you find anybody who is of no use in the world, but you often find people who want to be of some different use than they actually are. If a person comes to the point in his life where he is of no use to anyone, then I can see

that life for him is not worth living. *But* again, I have never known anyone who could not be of some use to somebody if he wanted to be. He may need some help in learning how to be useful to people, but he is seldom justified in saying that he is of no use to anyone. That is the second thing that makes life worth living.

And the third is this. It is the hope of being appreciated. It is not praise so much that human beings want, although many of us in our weaker moments enjoy flattery, but in our best selves we recognize flattery for what it is, and we cast it aside. We do not want it. We do crave and we do need and want the appreciation of the people we care about. What orchestra, for instance, can play its best if it does not feel the audience is responding and appreciating the music it makes? Applause does to a performer what rain and sunshine do to the ground. What teacher can do his best in a class unless he feels that the class is responding to what he is trying to teach? One of the reasons, I imagine, why some husbands and wives make such a poor showing of things, and find life dragging around about them, and their spirits sagging inside them, is that they are not greatly appreciated by the other member of the team. A person needs the appreciation of his partner to realize and be his best.

If a person gets to the point where he thinks that nobody cares about him, then I can see that life for him would not be worth living. But let me say this, when you get to that point, think twice. I think I have never known anybody for whom somebody did not care; and while this may seem beyond the reach of many of you,

as it did once to me, it is nevertheless true that though no one may seem to care about you, God cares. God made you. God loves you. God came into the world and died for you. And what you do and what you are is of the greatest possible concern to him; and he wants you to be with him, at your best, forever!

Those are the three things, then, that seem to me to make life always worthwhile: a certain amount of physical pleasure, a chance to be of use, and the appreciation of those who care about you. If you have only the first, life will eventually have no lure for you. If you have the second and third, you will be able to make amazing adjustments to any lack of the first.

Now, I have one or two things to say by way of practical advice. When you get to the point of asking, if you ever do, 'Is life worthwhile?' don't be frightened. Some people, I think, when they first penetrate the darkness of that mood, are filled with panic and they immediately conclude that they are going to pieces mentally. The question may be a symptom of some serious mental disorder, but in the normal course of things the chances are that it is not. It may be only the point where a mood, like a wave, breaks on the shore of your consciousness. Remember that other people, scores of them, have gone through the same thing. And these people certainly did not spend their lives in a mental institution.

Remember also that some good may come of it. More and more I am convinced, as I go through life and try to handle some of my own difficulties, that nothing ever comes to us from which some good cannot be extracted.

And sometimes I think that the deeper you go into life's darkest recesses, the higher you have the possibility of climbing to its finest things. The people who never ask any questions about life are not the ones who soar the highest. The people who do not know what depression is are likely to be the ones who never know what ecstasy is.

On the other hand, you must not be too easy with yourself. While this is a mood that you need not be afraid of, you certainly don't want to cultivate it. You don't want to nurse yourself in this particular mood, for it is not natural or normal, and you will not do your best while you are in it. My suggestion is this: when you ask yourself the next time, 'Is life worth living?' the answer may be at that time, No, your life now is not worth living. But you can make it worth living! As your life is now, there is no wonder that you don't think it is worth living. It is listless, lifeless, empty. There is nothing in it that would exhilarate anybody, but you as a human being, with the help of God, have the power to make it worth living.

God has not handed us this life, full-blown, ready-made, for us to enjoy. God gives us the raw materials and says to us, 'Now you go to work on them!' They are good, they are sound, some of them are better than others, but out of them you can make life and you can make it worthwhile. You may need to sharpen up your senses so that you enjoy life once again. It does not take money to enjoy it, for there are sights and sounds and touches and tastes that you can have without spending a penny.

You can be of some use to somebody if you really want to be, and if you don't know how to be, go and see your minister or your chaplain. He will tell you.

And if you come to the final stage and say, 'Well, after all, my life isn't worth living because nobody cares about me and nobody appreciates me,' the chances may be that nobody appreciates you because you have never gone out of your way to appreciate anybody else. Most of the people that I have known who feel that nobody cares for them are the people who really never care much about anybody else. If there could be a formula to such a mystery as this, it would be this: To make life worth living is to make somebody else's life worth living. Increase somebody else's enjoyment, give somebody else a chance to be of use to you, and let somebody else know that no matter how they may seem to be left high and dry on the beaches of the world, without anybody who cares whether they live or die, you do care. You will find, I can promise you, that when you make life worth living for somebody else, you will never have to ask yourself the question, Is my life worth living?

THE BODY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

This is a meditation on the words that every minister of the church says over and over again, thousands of times during his life, and every communicant hears when the Communion bread is given to him, 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.'

The words have to do with the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. A body is life localized for action and communication. Christ has had more than one body. He had, to begin with, a physical body of flesh and blood, very much like ours. It was the body that was laid in a manger when he was a baby, that climbed the hills of Galilee, that rested by Jacob's well, and that ultimately was hung upon a cross. In that body was localized for a few brief years the Love that makes men free.

Then he had a resurrection body. Death could not hold him; he completely overflowed the boundaries of death, and he reappeared, and his appearance had some

form and shape. In other words, he had a body after death; it was not, apparently, like the body he had before. It could pass through closed doors, it was not circumscribed in time and space, and yet people could meet him and talk with him, and be in communication with him even though they did not always recognize him. In this body was localized the splendor of the Risen Life.

And he had a mystical body, the Church, the fellowship of all faithful people. In those who were drawn to him, and who were willing to give their lives for him, in those people his life began to dwell and express itself, imperfectly, of course, because they were human and not always able to transmit the full power of his life. Nevertheless, in that group with all its flaws and blemishes, that life, that love that makes men free, was once again localized, and has been ever since, so that it can express itself and communicate itself to the world.

And finally, he has a sacramental body, bread. It is not perhaps what you might expect if you came upon this whole subject without any preliminary thought, and yet, if you had thought about it, it is almost exactly what you would expect, especially if you knew Jesus at all well. Bread — of the earth, earthy. Jesus — of the earth, earthy, in so far as his life was rooted in the ground of existence, coping with all the things that we have to cope with, struggling against the difficulties and the limitations of time and space, and the body. Bread, of the earth, earthy, the one thing that all men need for their very existence, at the most basic level of existence, and the one thing that all men secretly, if not openly, want. It does not seem strange at all, then, that this should be

another one of the places, a loaf of bread, in which the Love that makes men free is localized, temporarily at least, so that it can express itself and communicate itself.

Now a few comments on these various bodies which have contained and conveyed the life and spirit of Christ. They are all different. That is obvious, yet it is often overlooked, much to our confusion. Obviously, the bread is not like the flesh. They are two entirely different physical substances, and we get into great difficulties when we try to identify them, and try to explain, if we can, how the bread becomes flesh. Far more natural it is to say that it does not become flesh; it is not the same kind of body any more than his resurrection body was the same as his physical body, or the mystical body of the church is the same as either the physical or the resurrection body. The bodies are different in their natures; they are not alike; they are not the same. The life is the same, the quality and the character of the love that is localized in them is the same, but the expressions are different. To be sure, no one of the bodies is inconsistent with the life, but they are not identical.

Also, all of them have their limitations. They express only a fraction of the love of God that was incarnate in Christ. His physical body did not communicate that love to everyone; in fact, it reached a relatively few people who were particularly responsive to it. It never went outside the small dimensions of his own country. His resurrection body was limited also; it reached only a few people, those who knew him best. But to the general public it apparently had no meaning at all. The mystical body of the church, that is, the group of which we are

a part, that, too, has its institutional limitations and its human failings so that we are not as available a body as we would like to be for the Spirit that is dwelling in us. So the bread that for many thinly veils Christ's presence is limited in that it does not reach everyone; it does not convey to all people the kind of life that it conveys to some. But in each one of these expressions, there is some degree of the wondrous Love that makes men free.

Jesus did not deliberately choose any of these bodies. People are sometimes upset when the scholars, after tracing the historical origin of the Lord's Supper in the original documents, tell them that there does not seem to be any indication that Jesus himself intended it to become what it has become. It was a supper that he shared with his friends every Friday night. The night before he died was the night before the Passover and he shared the same simple meal with his friends. He used it this time to interpret his death, but there is no certainty that he intended it to become a sacramental meal in which the bread and his body are identified. There is no reason why he should have intended it. We do not choose our body; we are given a body. Jesus did not choose his physical body; God gave it to him. And it is not necessary to assume that he chose this particular body of bread and wine. The answer is that the bread has become the body for multitudes because of its association with him, because of its appropriateness, because throughout the generations the spirit of Christ has been most often discovered in the breaking of the bread. It is the body that God gave him and which has become his sacramental presence in the world.

This body was originally given for us. There is a difference between giving something *to* a person and giving something *for* a person. A parent, for instance, gives a toy to a child and the child takes it. That is quite different from the situation in which a parent gives his life for his child if the child is in danger. The child may not even be aware of it, and yet the parent is willing to give everything that he has, all his worldly substance, his affection, his life itself, if necessary, for the child, to save the child, to rescue the child from the hazard of death even though the child may not know what is happening. Love begins by giving something *to* a person and it ends by giving something *for* a person.

Jesus began by giving things to people. He gave to some health; he gave companionship to people who were lonely; he gave renewed courage to people who were discouraged; he gave his strength and vitality to all sorts and conditions of men. That is the way he began, but he ended by giving himself, his own life *for* people, even though most of them were not at all aware of it, even though many of them, perhaps, did not want it. He gave himself in order to preserve them from death, to preserve them from inner disintegration, not from physical death, obviously, but from the kind of disintegration that takes place in a man or woman when his self becomes the center of his life and all the rest of his life crumbles as it tries to gravitate around that which is not the real center and therefore cannot hold the rest of his life in its true place. By setting in motion the energies of the love which makes men free, Jesus gave himself in an extraordinary way for all people, not only for those who

happened to be around at the time, but for all people, for you and for me. By his death on the cross and by the life that led to the cross he set in motion the energies of love in us that can preserve us from that kind of disintegration which is selfishness, which is the death of our real self. So this bread becomes momentarily the visible expression of the life that was given for us.

This life is now given to us. Some things in the world we have to make, and we have to make them by effort and struggle, and sometimes it takes a good deal of straining and striving to accomplish them. We have to make a living, for instance; we have to make a place for ourselves in the world. But the great things in life we do not make; they are given to us. We do not make happiness. The person who goes out deliberately to create happiness for himself is doomed to failure because happiness is something that comes to you, it is given to you. You do not make the love on which you feed; you cannot force a person to love you, you cannot go out on a crusade to win for yourself the kind of love you need if your soul is to live, because love is something that is given to you. You have to be ready to take it, but you cannot create it yourself. Nor do you make ideas. You strain and struggle in your mind, with first one and then another, each less satisfactory than the last, and then an idea comes to you, and you take it.

It is not always easy to be on the receiving end of things. We do not like to be beholden to anyone. Sometimes when we hear these words, 'take this,' if we have paid any attention to them at the altar rail, if we are

honest with ourselves, some of us would shrink from them because we do not want to take anything from anybody. We want to be independent, we want to be able to rely on our own resources; we want to be our own masters. But life is not that way. The great things of life are given to you, and all you are asked to do is to be humble enough to take them. 'Take this.' You do not have to make it, you do not have to create it, you do not have to strive for it; it is given to you. But you have to take it, you have to open your hand to receive it, you have to want it enough to reach for it.

'Take and eat this' — that repels some people. They remember the stories they have read in their college textbooks about primitive people who believed that if they ate an animal they would in turn share some of the characteristics that the animal exhibits. They shrink from this because they see in it an echo of that primitive religion which they are proud to have outgrown. Personally, I am always thankful for the bread because the human race is all of one piece, and it is well to be reminded sometimes that our ancestors had some insights into reality that we in our sophistication have lost, and that we, with all our acquired knowledge, may not have outgrown some of the simplicities of our primitive forbears. They had an instinctive, impulsive sense that there was an emptiness inside them, and that they needed to consume something that could fill the emptiness. They may have expressed the need in crude form, but that crude form stands in these words as an echo from those early glimpses of the truth. 'Take and eat this,' make it a part of you,

assimilate it the way your body assimilates food, translate this life in terms of your own life, take this Love that makes men free and translate it in all sorts of ways in your own actions, in your thinking, in your attitudes towards people, in what you say, so that this life that you take in becomes so much a part of you, so absorbed by you that it becomes your life and you show it forth and give it out in every direction.

Eat it, remembering. 'Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee.' That may mean different things to different people; it can mean at least this much to everybody. Take this, remembering that somebody cared that much about you, take this remembering that God cares whether you live or die, take this remembering all the times when God, in dark difficult days, has borne you on eagle's wings to himself. Let your memories drift back to the times when life has been tough, and God has come into the midst of it and lifted it up to be part of himself.

'And feed on him.' How can I do that, you ask? You know what it means to feed on a book. If a young person discovers a great book that becomes the very meat and drink of his life, he reads it, studies it, absorbs it, pores over it; it becomes a part of the very atmosphere in which he exists. Remember how Emily Dickinson wrote:

He ate and drank the precious words,
  His spirit grew robust,
He knew no more that he was poor,
  Nor that his frame was dust.
He danced along the dingy days,

And this bequest of wings
Was but a book. What liberty
A loosened spirit brings! *

If feeding on a book can do that, think of what feeding on him who is the Lord of Life might do for you!

So when you come to his table, and put your empty hands in a position to receive that which is given, take this life that is so generously offered to you, think about it, remember from whence it comes, and let it become a part of you, and go out with a loosened spirit and a free mind to let that life speak through you so that the Love that made you free can make someone else free in this distressed world.

* *Poems for Youth,* Little, Brown & Company, p. 70.

FACING WEST

In the course of my ministry I see people almost every day who are rapidly going down the other side of the hill. And I mean the hill of life. They show very evident signs that they are beginning to fail physically, and it is quite obvious to everyone around them that their days are numbered. They have more days than you can count on your two hands, but they are numbered, nevertheless.

Their friends are frightened and upset. You can read the anxiety written in every line of their faces. Sometimes they seem to be surprised, vexed, and, quite naturally, sad. Their families often seem to be, somehow, relieved; relieved, perhaps, to be free of the heavy burden of care and responsibility. The people themselves, seldom, if ever, speak of it, and give no sign that they are aware of the fact that their days are relatively few. Some of them take it extraordinarily well. Some of them will say something like this: Of course, I live in the past now. I can't do what I used to, I don't expect to; but I have happy memories, and I am thankful for those. Some of them don't take it well at all. They complain, find fault,

keep looking backward to the brighter days that once were and are no more, and make it generally miserable for everyone who is around them.

Most of them, as far as I can see, are looking forward to nothing. They are full of secret and unspoken regrets. They can't see as well as they used to, they can't hear the way they used to, they can't walk as far or as fast as they used to, they can't remember people's names, they can't enjoy the things that they used to enjoy. They almost never mention death itself, and certainly no one ever mentions it to them, heaven forbid! The subject is clothed with secrecy and silence as though it didn't exist and, as far as anybody can see, they do nothing to prepare for it.

The simple assumption on the part of both their friends and themselves, at least so it appears to me, is that this is the end. It is inevitable and, therefore, it has to be accepted, but we will put it off as long as we can, they seem to say. It is regrettable, and almost inexcusable, that anything like this should happen to us.

Now in one way, of course, this is perfectly natural, and I don't want any of you to think that I do not or cannot sympathize with attitudes like these because, of course, I can. I often share them myself. It is perfectly natural that a person should feel these things. When we love someone, we don't want him to leave us and we are sad when he does. When I was a small boy, one of my grandmothers lived in the Midwest. One of the high points of the year was when she came to visit us during the month of August. I can remember as though it were yesterday that when she began to pack up to go home,

my heart began to sink. I didn't want her to leave us. On a much larger scale, in the mature relationships of life in which people have been bound closely together, of course they withdraw from the prospect of having a person that they love leave them.

Also, when we love life we don't want to leave it. Most of us do love life in spite of the difficulties that make it hard for us. We cling to it desperately, none the less, and enjoy it much of the time. The number of people who freely choose to take their own lives is really very small. And especially we don't want to leave it if we don't know exactly where we are going. Hamlet, you remember, would rather take the ills of this world than rush himself into another world that might be worse. The modern man takes it the other way round; the modern man would rather hold on to the few enjoyments he has here than to go to a place where there might not be any at all.

So the people I see, and these, remember, are for the most part Christians, are like people who know that they are going on a long journey. They dread the very thought of it; instead of counting the days, they draw them out as long as they possibly can; instead of getting their things packed, they try to forget about the whole business. This is the way a great many modern Christians approach death.

It is a long way we have come from the Apostle Paul. Listen to what he wrote in the last of all his letters; he wrote from the prison where he was kept during the last years of his life. I have taken a modern translation because it makes it all the more poignant to read it in the English that we use every day. 'I am torn in two direc-

tions,' wrote Paul, 'on the one hand I long to leave this world and live with Christ, and that is obviously the best thing for me. Yet, on the other hand, it is probably more necessary for you that I should stay here on earth.' This is an entirely different world from the one that most of us move in. Here is a man with an intellect that would make ours look like nothing at all; here is a man of rich and deep world-wide experience in the terms of the civilization of his day, who is not dreading death at all. He is virtually looking forward to it. Not trying to forget it in the least, he is getting ready for it, and preparing his friends for his departure!

If we are serious at all about these questions, we are bound to ask, What is the secret of a man like that? What is behind his attitude toward death? You find the secret in a line just before the lines that I have already read, and the line is this: 'For living,' Paul says, 'to me means simply Christ, and if I die I should merely gain more of him.' The most important thing in life to Paul was Christ. Paul didn't have any life worth speaking of until Christ gave him liberation from the things that were crippling his existence. From that time on, his whole life had been at the disposal of the liberating power of God in Christ. Christ was his entire life; life meant nothing else to him, and death would simply take him closer to the source of everything that had been dear and precious to him during his earthly existence.

This is beyond me, you say, and I do too, to be perfectly honest. After all, Paul was a spiritual giant and I am a pygmy. Granted! And then, if you were honest with yourself, you might go on to say, When you get right

down to it, I can't say honestly that life means *simply* Christ to me. Life means a great many things. Life means my family, my friends, my home, my children if I have them, and their future, my work and all the things that I am engaged in, my pleasures, my music and books, my travels and my homecomings; all these things make up life, and all these things mean a great deal to me, and I would be absolutely unrealistic and dishonest if I made any pretense that Christ meant life to me in the sense that life meant nothing else. Most of us have never lived on the thin edge of existence the way Paul did, and the way thousands of refugees in Europe did during the war and after. Our life is still cradled in the normal accompaniments of human existence and it is almost impossible for us to 'center down' in Christ.

A wonderful woman I know once said to me, 'I wouldn't mind dying at all if I was sure that my husband would be there to meet me.' We may paraphrase that and say that a modern Christian might say something like this, 'I wouldn't mind dying if I cared as much about Christ as Paul did, and were sure that he would be there to meet me.' That is where we have to begin in thinking about these things. You cannot force yourself into Paul's attitude. No one, preacher or anyone else, can tell you that you must believe this. These are things that must come from within, from deep down in a person, and grow upwards toward fulfillment; they cannot be imposed, they cannot be forced. You cannot grow up into this overnight. You can only begin with yourselves where you are and, when you do begin at that point,

there are two or three things that come immediately to mind that you can do.

The first thing you can do by way of clearing the ground, and this is extremely important, is to recognize what a great gap there is at present between your conscious religious beliefs and your subconscious religious attitudes. (This does not apply to everybody; you can't make generalizations about things like this; there are great exceptions. I am speaking about the rank and file of people that we meet in our churches.) You can see the gap between what you believe formally in a religious way and what you really feel down deep within you. It may shock you when you take the first look. Once a year, we celebrate Easter royally. We sing about the Resurrection and the Life. We hear the Gospel, how Jesus rose on the third day from the dead; we hear the declaration that death has no sting and the grave no victory. We believe, at least formally in our conscious minds, that because he lives, we shall live also, and this we believe sincerely. Yet we are afraid to talk about death with a friend, or with someone in our family, or with ourselves. Subconsciously, we treat it as though it were the worst thing that could possibly happen to a man.

This is unhealthy because it is unreal, and we ought to be doing something deliberately to close that gap. I am not so concerned about the people who do not pretend to believe anything about a life beyond this one, but it does concern me that so many Christian people who profess to believe and really do believe, in the top part of their minds at least, that Christ is the Resurrec-

tion and the Life are down deep still uncertain, insecure, and secretly afraid of death.

Another thing that you can do is to stop and think more seriously and deliberately than you do now about your attitude toward death. You may not like these suggestions and, if you don't, there is good reason for you to assume that there is something in this realm that you have not faced, let alone resolved. The next time a friend, or someone whom you think a great deal of, begins to slip away, examine your thoughts about it. Why do you feel the way you do? The sadness is natural and right. But why the feeling of emptiness? If you subconsciously feel that this life has been lost, that that is the end of it, why do you feel that way? Is he really going to be lost, or is there something that makes you at least hope, if you don't believe it absolutely, that he is going to be released into larger fields of light?

Think of it all in the light of Christian belief and teaching, not trying to impose anything upon yourself, not trying to swallow, so to speak, something that you cannot believe, but think of it all in the light of the great framework of Christian belief. Then see where you stand — way over there left of center. You might talk about it, perhaps, not with the person, that might not be wise, but with other people who know the person. Talk about it naturally as though this was something that was in the normal course of events, not the worst thing that could happen to a person. It might even be the fulfillment of his life.

The next time you yourself face the possibility of death, which many of us do from time to time when

danger brushes our side, stop and think of these things; key your thoughts up to the higher register of Christian thinking, not down to the lower registers of ordinary, everyday secular thinking. Why should I dread this? Why am I afraid of it? Why do I assume that it is the worst that can happen? Why don't I start to get ready, not in any grim way, but quietly garnering the things that have meant most to me, and lay up some of the treasures that have been most precious to me in my life? Why don't I start to do these things in acknowledgment of the fact that I haven't all the time in the world?

You may not be able to say what Paul said, and if you can't say it honestly, don't say it, because there is nothing worse than religious dishonesty. You may not have come to that point, but you very well might be able to say what Lord Balfour said as he closed his eyes in death, 'This is going to be a great experience.'

The last thing you can do is this; it is the most difficult, and the most essential. You can point your affections more and more toward Christ. You can't, as we have already indicated, force your affections. You can't compel yourself to love anyone, or to set your affections upon any given object, but you can train your affections. You can guide them up the trellises that you build for them, and you can focus them on the things that you know in your own heart to be the most important and the most enduring in life. You can expose your affections to the influences that you would like to have control them; you can care more and more about the life that liberates, and less and less about the life that simply

accumulates. You can refine your interests in life. When you are young, you begin by loving life, and you want to draw it all into yourself, and that is right and normal. But as you grow older, there ought to be a discriminating refinement, weeding out this and that which has proved less valuable than other more durable things, until finally, instead of wanting to draw all life to yourself, you want above everything else, to give what life you have to others. Living will then mean Christ to you, more and more. All the other things will not be eliminated; they will be subordinated to that one central desire.

In other words, you can grow into the stature of Christ, that is what I am trying to say, while avoiding the technical language. And I am sure this is true, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' May I dare to add this line of my own, Where your heart is there you will not fear to go. If your treasure is in the things of Christ, your heart will be there, and if your heart is there, you will not be fearful to go there yourself.

These abstract ideas are always more vivid when they are translated into personalities, and I can do that now because I once knew a person who illustrated exactly what I mean. He was Dr. Arthur Kinsolving, Sr., for many years Rector of St. Paul's Church, Baltimore. He had been at St. Paul's for a long time when I arrived as the new Rector of Emmanuel Church. He was my nearest neighbor, and I was young and totally inexperienced. He was the first person who came to call on me, and the last person I saw before I left Baltimore.

He was my friend, my pastor, and my counselor. I think I have never known anybody who loved the world more than he did. He loved people with intense enjoyment; he loved parties as much as anyone I have ever seen. He enjoyed a good joke more than almost anyone else I have ever known. And yet, you couldn't be with him for more than three minutes without realizing that his affection was not on these things, but on something higher and far beyond them. You would see him trudging up Saratoga Street day after day, in all kinds of weather, to visit the sick and the people in trouble, whether they were in his parish or whether they weren't. There was a quality about him that you couldn't miss, and you knew that his heart was somehow in Christ, and that his affections were set, not on things on the earth but on the things above where 'Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'

When I came to Boston, Dr. Kinsolving followed me with his interest and, in February 1950, I got a letter from him about a sermon of mine that he had read. This is what he said,

> I am now an old man nearing my eighty-ninth natal day. During my youth I was a great reader of sermons, those of Phillips Brooks, Henry Scott Holland, and of H. P. Liddon, of Alexander McLaren, Dean C. J. Vaughan, F. W. Robertson, and others. I still read, and am read to several hours each day. Recently I have found great comfort in William Temple's *Readings in St. John's Gospel.* I am now facing west, and these messages of St. John come home to me with great inspiration, and seem to fit my mood.

'Facing west' is a great phrase, and in what a spirit he faced it! Not with sentimentality, but with a quiet, sure, simple confidence. As he faced the west, he faced Christ, and what might have been for others a setting sun, was for him a sun about to rise in all its splendor.

We began this book by facing the necessity of putting away childish things in order to become a more mature human being. This involves not only leaving behind some of our childish ways and thoughts, but also of growing up to our adult responsibilities and perceptions. There is no surer sign that a person has achieved at least a measure of this maturity than in his ability to encounter death quietly without the hidden fears of childhood and with no secret desire to stay longer in this wonderful world which is but a foretaste of another yet to come.

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